

# Mp3 Joseph Gramley - Global Percussion



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A bravura solo performance of world multi-percussion--from traditional African melody to contemporary American minimalism--by a "brilliant" (NEW YORK TIMES) young musician with a growing international reputation. 10 MP3 Songs CLASSICAL: Contemporary, AVANT GARDE: Modern Composition Show all album songs: Global Percussion Songs Details: GLOBAL PERCUSSION Joseph Gramley Joseph Gramley--Biography Lauded by the Cleveland Plain Dealer as a Heifetz of the marimba, multi-percussionist Joseph Gramley grew up in Oregon and was named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts as a high-school senior in 1988. He did his undergraduate work at the University of Michigan and also attended the Interlochen Arts Academy, the Tanglewood Institute and Salzburg Mozarteum. Gramley made his concerto debut with the Houston Symphony Orchestra after winning their National Soloist Competition, and made his solo debut at Carnegie Halls Weill Recital Hall in 1994. After graduate studies at the Juilliard School in New York, he performed with the Ethos Percussion Group throughout the U. S. and Europe. An invitation from Yo-Yo Ma in 2000 led Gramley to join Mr. Ma's Silk Road Project. He has toured with Mr. Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble throughout North America, Europe and Asia, performing in the world's finest concert halls. Along the way, Gramley has studied percussion styles and instruments from around the globe, collaborating with internationally-renowned musicians from India, Iran, China, Japan, Korea and Central Asia. Gramley's performances as a soloist have garnered critical acclaim and enthusiasm from emerging composers, percussion aficionados and first-time concert-goers alike. He is committed to bringing fresh and inventive compositions to a broad public, and each year he commissions and premieres a number of new works. His first solo recording, American Deconstruction, appeared in 2000. Introduction from Joseph Gramley: On my earlier CD, American Deconstruction (2000), I performed works written in this country since 1977, hoping to highlight the full range of instrumentation available to

today's multi-percussionist. With *Global Percussion* I'd like to shift the listener's attention toward what's come to be known as world music. I can't say I much like the phrase; it's become a lazy marketing label for hard-to-classify stuff at Tower Records, but I've been eager to put together a collection of percussion pieces that would reflect the ever-widening global influences on people writing music and on performers like myself. Composers have long looked outside their own borders for inspiration; think of Ravel hearing Indonesian music at the 1889 World's Fair, or Henry Cowell's youthful exposure to Chinese opera in San Francisco, but today's imaginative cross-currents are more fluid than ever. No music is more global than percussion; drums and blocks and bells seem to be ubiquitous. Fifty years ago last spring, a French ethnologist working in Vietnam discovered an enormous Stone Age marimba made of gray schist rock. One of its eleven plates weighed 25 pounds and was 40 inches long. Seven of them were pitched in a pentatonic scale, reflecting somebody's ancient drive to make complex music. It's a mistake to think that drums don't generate a melody. All instruments do; one can phrase beautifully on every component of a multi-percussion setup. But it's on the marimba that one attains an expressiveness unreachable with any other percussion instrument. The range of a marimba's dynamics (louds and softs) seems almost unreal to me at times. One of its notes can fill a room, and one technically demanding run up its keyboard can send the performer and with any luck the audience over the edge. The marimba is central to a number of pieces on this CD, but even so, it's just one instrument in a multi-percussionist's configuration. And each such configuration is sufficiently unique that no two percussionists can really end up with the same sound. It's easy, in fact, for the multi-percussionist to feel that the instruments he's playing have a life of their own. Think about it for a moment: percussion instruments (other than hand drums) are some of the very few with which players have no direct physical contact. Almost every other kind of instrument is touched by the performer, but we percussionists typically have to use a conduit—our sticks and mallets. The arm's length at which we hold most of our instruments gives us, I think, a respectful sense of their autonomy—of their existence not as tools but as collaborators. The other living element who joins the composer, the performer and the instruments is, of course, the listener. I'm happy to welcome you to *Global Percussion*.

--Joseph Gramley

**Notes on the Selections:** In concert, Gramley will often open his program with *Ganda Yina*, and he finds it a natural first track for *Global Acoustic*, too. This piece is a great introduction to the sonorous qualities of the marimba, he explains. It draws the listener into the instrument's full potential through its rich tones and strong but mellow feeling. Gramley remembers first coming across *Ganda Yina*

when he attended a Percussive Arts Society master class given by the great marimba soloist Valerie Naranjo: Valerie had heard the piece performed in Ghana by its composer, KAKRABA LOBI, and she obtained permission to publish the work here in the United States. Lobi, who has taught for decades at the University of Ghana, is probably the greatest living master of the Ghanaian marimba, or gyl, and is known for influencing the improvisations of countless percussionists around the world. Ganda Yina, whose title translates into English as The Strong Man Is Out, joyously celebrates the just-concluded life of a tribal elder. Throughout the piece, the performers left hand plays an ostinato--a single, persistent rhythmic pattern that takes its name from the Italian word for obstinate or stubborn. If that pattern represents the unchanging eternity into which the strong man has now passed, then the pieces melody--leaping and singing and lunging under the performers right hand--can be seen as a recreation of the vibrant life the strong man lived. I love to play Ganda Yina, says Gramley. Its like nothing else. That it was improvised by Lobi only adds to the feeling of a vitality thats unstoppable. \*\*\* Gramley discovered many of the pieces on Global Percussion through teachers and older performers, but EUGENE NOVOTNEYs snare-drum solo A Minute of News came to him through one of his own high-school students in the Juilliard Summer Percussion Seminar, which hes directed since 2000. Its got an infectious groove and is full of really good hooks, he says. I knew immediately that Id like to perform this piece. Most of it is composed in a rhythm found all over the world called clave, whose antecedent/consequent pattern can appear in two forms: rumba (2+3) and son (3+2). Novotney, born in California in 1960, has often looked toward Latin America for inspiration as a composer, performer and teacher. Rock-and-roll and Motown have been influences, too, along with jazz and symphonic repertoire. A Minute of News, which has earned its place in a four-volume set of solos called The Noble Snare, leaves Gramley with his hands full and occasionally empty. It requires him to zig and zag over the drum with sticks, timpani mallets, wire brushes, stick clicks, rim shots, and sometimes just his fingers and palms. The combination of a heavy groove with light to heavy touches makes this piece a lot of fun to play. \*\*\* WILLIAM SUSMAN met Gramley a few years ago after a Silk Road concert in California. The composer remembers being deeply impressed with his musicianship, virtuosity, and world music background and Gramley was equally impressed with Susman, whom he describes as a fabulous pianist who nonetheless really gets the marimba something not always true of composers who dont play the instrument themselves. Born in Chicago in 1960, Susman grew up learning jazz and classical piano before studying composition at the

University of Illinois and Stanford. Perhaps his most important mentor was the composer Earle Brown, whose own mobile form was influenced by Calder's sculpture. In 1985, Brown selected Susman, only 25, to be the youngest recipient of Harvard's Fromm Music Foundation Commission, which goes to pathbreaking classical composers. Over the past decade, Susman has gained recognition for the scores he has composed for documentary and independent films, including *Oil on Ice* (2004), but it's his innovative classical work, widely performed in Europe and the U. S., that has won him the awards of organizations ranging from the Percussive Arts Society to ASCAP. Susman's classical pieces, however emotive, often derive their shapes from such intellectual sources as the laws of fluid mechanics or the composer's long-held fascination with Fibonacci's 13th-century numerical sequence 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 in which each number equals the sum of the two coming before it. *Marimba Montuo* owes its harmony to the Fibonacci series and its pulse to Afro-Cuban rhythms, particularly the *montuo*, a particular ostinato (see *Ganda Yina* above) that's repeated continually in the same pitch and voice. I compose in small sections or chunks and then organize the sound into a fixed order, says Susman. The end result is rhythmically supercharged—a test of dexterity and speed for the marimbist. Gramley's unflagging ability to play the rhythms simultaneously in both hands—a relatively new feature of 4-mallet marimba technique and composition—led Susman to dedicate the finished *Marimba Montuo* to the performer. But even before that Gramley had made the work his own. I usually know within the first page if something I want is a keeper. *Marimba Montuo* is that kind of piece. \*\*\* I love to improvise, says Gramley, whose musical niche offers frequent opportunities to do just that. None of the solo repertoire in classical percussion predates the twentieth century, he points out, and it gives the performer a chance to keep inventing within a compositional framework. That's something that attracted me to the work of PHILIP GLASS. Gramley overcame some initial resistance to the composer whose written only two works primarily for percussion through the influence of a friend who would play the music of Philip Glass nonstop, 24/7. Additional exposure turned indifference to intrigue and finally to a keen interest, especially in *1+1*, a work that Glass composed in 1968, at the age of 31, midway on his journey from serialism through Indian music and onward to such historic works as *Einstein on the Beach*. In western music, Glass himself has observed, harmony and melody are the dominant elements and rhythm tags along; it doesn't really create a structure. In most nonwestern music, rhythmic structure is in fact the structure of the music. Through this realization, the composer saw the beginning of a new musical language for himself. One of his early

utterances in it was 1+1, a composition that was really, he's explained, more of a process than a piece of music. It described a way of notating music through what I began to call additive process taking a measure of music and adding one note to it and repeating it and then adding another note or subtracting a note. The results, full of improvisational room for a performer like Gramley, can be captured in their entirety in just a few pages of notation. Gramley's biggest challenge in playing 1+1 is to draw the listener in with a composition whose rhythmic melody is discernible through just two cells (Glass's term). For his rendition of the work, Gramley decided to use two separate wooden tables as a kind of play on the title 1+1. He then attached an acoustic guitar's contact microphone and ran it through an amp. He plays the entire piece with just the palms and fingertips of his own hands as well as a steady stream of imagination. There's nothing limiting about the score, he marvels. In fact, it makes you really open up your brain to the possibilities inherent in just two rhythms—a kind of minimalism that you take to the max. \*\*\* I'm always on the lookout for new compositions that inspire me and that I can bring to a larger audience, says Gramley. He found one in *Danza del Fuego*, originally written for classical guitar by JOHN LA BARBERA, who began his career during the 1970s, performing both solo and chamber music in Italy. The exposure to Mediterranean music that La Barbera gained would influence the style he went on to develop as a U. S. studio musician working with an array of international artists. He has composed music for several Off-Broadway productions and folk operas, and is musical director of the Italian music-and-dance group I Giullari di Piazza. La Barbera's composing credits for film include *Children of Fate* (1993) and *Cutting Loose* (1996), each a prizewinner at the Sundance Film Festival. Guitar music tends to lend itself well to the marimba, explains Gramley. The ranges are similar, and so are the physical abilities of the guitarist and marimbist to play about the same number of notes at a time. By contrast, when piano music is transcribed for the instrument, the larger chordal writing has usually got to be edited down. Gramley, who's joined on this piece by Yousif Sheronick playing the doumbek, realized that his own transcription of *Danza del Fuego* would give him a chance to include a second work with a Spanish flavor on this globally-focused album, as well as the opportunity to couple John La Barbera's modern take on the guitar with Fernando Sor's classical use of the instrument. \*\*\* In the more than thirty works that she's composed for the marimba, KEIKO ABE has vastly expanded the instrument's literature, transforming what was once considered a primitive folk instrument into a full-fledged concert one. Gramley first met Abe when he was a freshman at the University of Michigan in 1989. His professor Michael Udow had invited the composer

to give a series of concerts throughout the state, and Gramley was excited to hear Abe perform her percussion-quintet piece *Conversation in the Forest* one of the early incarnations of *Prism*, which hadn't been published at the time: Keiko gave me a copy of her manuscript, he recalls, and I ran to the practice room to begin learning the piece. *Prism* quickly became one of Gramley's favorite marimba solos. Over the years Abe has arranged the work for marimba duet, marimba and percussion ensemble, and marimba with orchestra, but it was born as a two-mallet marimba solo that, like many of Abe's compositions, sprang from improvisation. Gramley tries to keep this spontaneous quality in evidence when he performs the work himself. The shifts and bends in the development of the melody reflect what happens to a ray of light as it meets a prism, he explains. Keiko's fast, slicing melodic lines mimic the geometric figures refraction and dispersal of light, and her piece ends up achieving the same symmetry that the prism itself has. The work lies beautifully on the marimba. It's a great piece of idiomatic writing that really speaks to me. Gramley has performed with Abe off and on for more than a decade, most recently at the 2001 Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Nashville. Keiko is a tiny woman, he notes, with a small sweet voice and mellow demeanor. That is, of course, until she starts to play. The sound really does come from deep inside her. I strive on *Prism* and other pieces to attain her raw power and emotional commitment to the sound of the marimba. \*\*\* During Gramley's days with Ethos, the group performed two of CHARLES GRIFFIN's percussion quartets, one of them a commission (*The Persistence of Past Chemistries*). In 2001, with the aid of a Meet-the-Composer grant from New Music Marimba, Gramley got ready to begin collaborating with Griffin on a solo piece using multi-keyboard composition. Their first brainstorming session, destined to be rescheduled, was set for the morning of September 11 at Gramley's studio in Manhattan. Charles Griffin, a native New Yorker whose choral and instrumental works have been performed throughout the U. S. and Europe, remembers how the 9/11 attacks colored our moods and thoughts every time he and Gramley met in the months that followed. During an early work session, while improvising with Gramley's mallets on the marimba, the composer came up with an opening whose mood reminded [him] a little of Randall Thompson's choral work *Alleluia*, a reverent request for peace written during the Second World War. Much of what Griffin wrote next would be marked by fragmentation and violence, but he remembers how, around January of 2002, the first snowfall of the season created one of those cityscapes that make New York beautiful in a way it isn't at any other time. Some of the anger about September 11 was beginning to leave him, and the coda to his new composition came back

around to the prayerful opening section in a way that may suggest conciliation to a listener. *Visitations* would not be fully finished until early 2004, shortly before Gramley recorded it. Griffin explains that when a composer assembles a unique combination of musical instruments for a single percussionist, it's as if he's creating a brand new instrument. In the complex *Visitations*, Griffin wrote for three keyboards: concert marimba, vibraphone and crotalessmall, chromatic, antique Turkish bells. At the piece's climax, a bass drum, cymbals and gongs are also heard. Griffin knew he had this really amazing, just monster, player in Joe Gramley, but he also knew, during their months of collaboration, that he was pushing the performer towardand sometimes even beyondhis limits. Gramley remembers his own approach to the work becoming much more serious and deeply focused in the post-9/11 atmosphere, but he describes the mental and physical challenges with a kind of athletic relish. While pointing out how the keyboards require three different types of mallets (switched by the performer when either hand has a moment off), he also catalogs the different sorts of strokes he's got to keep alternating: very hard downstroke; quick upstroke; smooth, full downstroke. And don't forget the pedal in the vibraphone! *Visitations* is such a balancing act that in order to perform it, I've got to take off my shoes. Otherwise I'll slip off the pedal. Memorization of Griffin's music also proved a must: There is no physical way for me to look at four different performance environmentsand sheet music to boot. And yet, what pleases Gramley mostthe surest indicator of his successful collaboration with Griffinis how the emotional beauty of the piece never gets lost in the performing tour de force it requires. \*\*\* Gramley has yet to turn 35, but he's seen a vast change in the available solo percussion repertoire between his earliest playing days and the present. As a boy learning the marimba and xylophone, he typically played music that had been transcribednot written originallyfor his instruments. These compositions--first intended for piano, violin and guitar--came to him as adaptations, but ones that carried their own opportunities for growth. I learned to phrase in the manner of the original instrument, he recalls with pleasure, and to wonder why the guitar transferred especially well. Maybe it's as simple as four mallets being not so different from five fingers. He first began playing the D-major *Estudio* (No. 6) when he was a fifteen-year-old student at Interlochen. The piece is so plainly beautiful and lyrical that it has stuck with me to this day. The composer, FERNANDO SOR (1778-1839), thrived as both a performer and a composer after leaving his native Spain for political exile. His guitar works, full of challenging key signatures, also came to include *Estudio* No. 17, which Gramley performs here along with No. 6. These two *estudios* are just thatstudies, he explains. Each sets out to achieve a

technical goal on the guitar. And yet they can stand, stylishly, on their own musical merits. With the work of Fernando Sor, Gramley and this CD come full circle home to the performers earliest days and to some of the music that started him on his global-percussive journey. 1. Ganda Yina, trad., Karkraba Lobi, arr. Karkraba Lobi and Valerie Narango 6:02 2. A Minute of News, by Eugene Novotney 3:03 Sonic Art Editions (BMI). Used by permission of Smith Publications, 2617 Gwyndale Ave., Baltimore, MD 21207 USA 3. Marimba Montuo by William Susman 8:55 (ASCAP) 4. 1+1 (take 220), by Philip Glass. Dunvagen Music Publishers, Inc. 3:20 5. Danza del Fuego, by John LaBarbera 4:45 6. Prism (for Marimba), by Keiko Abe 4:49 7. 1+1 (take 218), by Philip Glass. Dunvagen Music Publishers, Inc. 3:20 8. Visitations, by Charles B. Griffin. Coriolis Press (ASCAP). 14:55 For further information see charlesgriffin.net. 9. Estudio No. 6, by Fernando Sor 1:30 10. Estudio No. 17, by Fernando Sor 3:45 TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 62:44 Recorded March 4-6, 2004, St. Pauls Church, Brooklyn, NY

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