

Mp3 Joseph Gramley - American Deconstruction



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The five pieces on this new release boldly illustrate the huge range of material available to the modern multi-percussionist and this artist's athletic performances prove his mastery of the whole thrilling spectrum. 5 MP3 Songs CLASSICAL: Contemporary, AVANT GARDE: Modern Composition Show all album songs: American Deconstruction Songs Details: American Deconstruction / Joseph Gramley (2006 Reissue) Liner Notes by Thomas Mallon Biography Acclaimed for his superb musicianship and charismatic stage presence, Joseph Gramley has emerged as the foremost American multi-percussionist of his generation, lauded by the Cleveland Plain Dealer as a Heifetz of the marimba and by conductor Christoph Eschenbach for his tremendous vitality, character and sophistication. Born in 1970 and raised in Oregon, Gramley made his concerto debut with the Houston Symphony Orchestra after winning their National Soloist Competition in 1992, and his solo debut at Carnegie Hall in 1994. Following graduate studies at the Juilliard School in New York, he performed with the Ethos Percussion Group throughout the U. S. and Europe. In 2000, Yo-Yo Ma invited Gramley to join the Silk Road Ensemble, now the best-selling classical music group in the world. For the past half dozen years Gramley has played with the Ensemble across North America, Europe and Asia. In addition to his solo appearances and work with Silk Road, Gramley has lately won further accolades for his performances with organist Clive Driskill-Smith in their duo Organized Rhythm. Introduction by Joseph Gramley During the past five years, whether doing solo concerts or recording with the Silk Road Ensemble, I've seen my musical focus grow ever more internationala development reflected in the CD I released last year, Global Percussion. Its pieces ranged from a traditional Ghanaian melody to a modern composition by Japans Keiko Abe to works by U. S. composers who've been strongly influenced by other cultures sounds and styles. But through all my actual and musical travels, I've remained deeply involved with the challenging postmodern American

compositions that have so increased multi-percussions repertoire in recent decades. Thats why Im happy to re-issue and re-introduce American Deconstruction, the first of my CDs, which originally appeared in 2000. The best definition of deconstruction Ive ever seen the one that led me to the title for this CD explains the term as the disruption of a construction or composition with the purpose of producing other, new meanings with the same elements. Its an entirely positive act, a dismantling in order to create something new. I hope thats what youll hear me attempting to accomplish during these five recorded performances. Ive tried to find as much meaning as I can in each works disparate melodies and rhythms, and tried most of all to assemble those elements into a performance worthy of the gifted composer who put them at my disposal. Joseph Gramley New York City Summer 2006 Program Notes by Thomas Mallon

The five pieces on AMERICAN DECONSTRUCTION boldly illustrate the new range of material available to the modern multi-percussionist--and Joseph Gramleys performances prove his mastery of that repertoires widely varied sensibilities. If this CDs more abstract and cerebral work by, say, Steve Reich and William Duckworth appeals to one side of Gramleys enthusiasms, its quite another his penchant for playing full-out, with a spontaneous athleticism that has drawn him a number of times to collaborate with DAVID LANG. David shows a real, raw directness in his work, says Gramley, who along with Eos Orchestra and Evelyn Glennie premiered Langs Loud Love Songs in 2004. There is no pretense with him. David is very New York, and he reflects a really urban sensibility when he uses materials like heavy metals and flower pots! A co-founder of New Yorks Bang on a Can music festival, Lang earned a doctorate from Yale and holds the position of Composer-in-Residence at San Franciscos American Conservatory Theater. He says he often writes for percussion, because whenever he does it proves liberating. Instead of having to keep a specific instrument in mind, he gets to concentrate on a person with a skill. Percussionists may be called upon to play a thousand different instruments. Youre sort of choreographing their actions with your music. Rather than a fixed sound, they each have an attitude toward the world, a different sense of how things are arranged and how rhythm works. This immense variation can result, Lang says, in something tremendously loud or deliberately shimmering. In his Anvil Chorus (1991), the emphasis falls decidedly on the first. For this piece Lang didnt want to work with the pretty instruments, like vibraphone or chimes, that were invented so that percussionists could play politely with other musicians. I wanted to write a piece that reminded the listener of how since the beginning of time people have always banged on things just by practicing their professions. Here the profession is

blacksmithing not the way it sounds in Verdis *Il Trovatore*, but the way it probably did in a medieval shop where the smiths used songs to coordinate their movements and make sure it was the metals and not one another that received the hammers blows. Lang explains that *The Anvil Chorus* uses a melody, played on resonant junk metals of the percussionists own choosing, to control various beat patterns. The piece has been recorded four times and performed hundreds. Gramleys version, presented here, is especially skilled and dynamic. Joe is an unbelievably strong and mighty player, says Lang. A listeners excitement will proceed from what Gramley himself felt upon discovering the piece, with its exhilarating combination of freedom and demands. Im always on the lookout for works that have multiple themes and melodies that a single artist has got to perform simultaneously, he explains, and with *The Anvil Chorus*s four distinct melodies, the musician has to operate not so much like a percussionist as a kind of dervish. Ive got five pedals to manipulate with my feet and two keyboards above the pedals, says Gramley. The first of these keyboards is formed by a series of Chinese opera gongs and the second selected by Gramley with the wide latitude Lang likes giving to percussionists consists of four Indonesian gamelan, or button gongs, whose different surface portions produce both bell-like sonorities and a series of bracing, if less pure, harmonics. The end result is a bravura combination of lyricism and sheer force. Not surprisingly, Gramley hopes to combine once more with Lang himself: he plans to perform the composers even more difficult *Scraping Song* on a forthcoming CD of experimental work. _____ Ive been playing STEVE REICHs music since I performed *Sextet* as a fifteen-year-old student at Interlochen Arts Academy, Gramley recalls, with a bit of wonder. I cant remember a time when he hasnt been part of my musical experience. Im always aware of what hes up to and what hes working on. *Nagoya Marimbas* was commissioned from Reich in 1994 to celebrate the opening of a new concert hall in the Japanese city. When Gramley first heard it in a live performance, he was a recent Juilliard graduate embarking on a solo career in New York; he knew immediately that he wanted to play the piece. *Sextet* had remained one of my favorite compositions, and I was struck by a kinship between some of the writing for vibraphone and marimba in that earlier piece and the marimba lines in this new work of Reichs. Even so, and without a doubt, *Nagoya Marimbas* is a more challenging work to perform. As Reich himself has noted, the piece requires two virtuoso performers to deliver its abundance of melodic patterns, each of which is usually repeated no more than three times. Gramley jokes that anyone listening to his recording of the work might think I have five hands, given that he seems to be playing both major parts of the work at once. In fact he

recorded one marimba part at a time, overdubbing the second onto the first. Hes so drawn to Reichs composition that on the first night of a recent solo tour he performed one part of it while a guest artist played the other; on the second night the two of them switched. Steve Reich (b. 1936) is widely recognized, along with Philip Glass, as a father of American minimalism. The African and Balinese influences in his music have proved increasingly attractive to Gramley, too, as his performing career has developed. When I play Steve Reichs music, I am really put into a different zone, a new mindset, he marvels. Some of the music is so difficult that I may feel like a deer in the headlights, but Im definitely transformed and incredibly focused. In 2005, Gramley had the chance to perform Nagoya Marimbas at the World Expo in Nagoya itself. It was a privilege, and a thrill, to bring this piece back to its home.

_____ Postminimalism, says Gramley, is a really new American style, and its been defined, more than by anything else, by the work of WILLIAM DUCKWORTH. The composer, born in 1943 in North Carolina, has written six books and scores of musical compositions, the grandest of which may be Cathedral, an interactive opus of computer music and traditional sound that has been on the Web since 1997. A disciple and scholar of John Cage, Duckworth still feels the influence of that composers observation, made in 1937, that percussion music would provide a contemporary transition from keyboard-influenced music to the all-sound music of the future. Duckworth reminds listeners that from the early twentieth century on--when orchestral composers like Stravinsky began using more and more of it, and then composers like Cage and Lou Harrison took things even further-- percussion has evolved into a musical end in itself. Duckworth himself began writing solo percussion music in the late 1960s and early 70s, when he became acquainted, during graduate work at the University of Illinois, with the players and work of the Black Earth Ensemble. Percussionists, he says, are always trying to do new things, because theyre not wedded to the traditional forms of music with melody and tonal harmony. These players have gone from being auxiliary members of the orchestra to being stars. When recalling big-name performers from the 1930s to the 1960s, such as Gene Krupa and Max Neuhaus, the composer predicts: Joe Gramley is one of the next people in that line of development. Gramley himself points out that the repertoire often chooses the performer which is what happened almost fifteen years ago when, as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, he first heard Duckworths Meditation Preludes (1977). Years went by before he ran into Duckworth at Bucknell University, where the composer teaches. Gramley at last made sure to ask for the score of this piece that had permanently lodged itself in his imagination.

Meditation Preludes, whose origin Duckworth traces to the bitonality of Darius Milhauds Saudades du Brasil, is written for one and a half octaves of tuned almglocken and either vibraphone or marimba. Gramley has chosen the latter whenever hes played the piece: Im really moved by the textural difference between the metal bells of the almglocken and the wooden bars of my marimba. One of the great things about this work is that the two keyboards begin by having their own voices and distinct timbres, each in a different key, but as things progress, they slowly merge into one melodic line and into the same key. At the opening, I try to make no discernible attack sound in fact, I try to make the almglockens bell feel as if its emanating from somewhere other than the metal. Later on I get going with a definite attack articulation. Theres a kind of wonderful struggle between the two approaches throughout the piece. Duckworth is modest about the influence that Meditation Preludes has had on composers and players, preferring to point out the influence its had on him. It made me see the possibilities for other things, such as Gathering Together, a piece for two percussionists and two piano players that I wrote for the Italian group Ars Ludi in the early 1990s. Asked who the ideal player of Meditation Preludes might be, he responds without hesitation: Its Joe. The ideal player has an enormous amount of virtuosity and talent, but is also able to transcend that talent and give us something more than technical perfection. Joe is one of those performers who knows how to play the music beyond the notes. _____ By his own estimation, PAUL SMADBECK (b. 1955) hasnt written a lot of stuff. But Rhythm Song (1981) has earned a prominent, and permanent, place in the modern marimbists repertoire a canon whose rapid expansion began in the 1970s, when Smadbeck was studying in upstate New York with Leigh Stevens and Gordon Stout, the founders of a new school of marimba players, the composer recalls. It was Stevens innovative grips and techniques that permitted what Smadbeck calls a whole new lateral approach to playing. With a musician now able to roll with one hand using four mallets instead of two to execute scales and arpeggios compositional changes were bound to follow. Smadbeck began writing tunes with the new techniques, and then made a real departure from them in Rhythm Song, where the marimbas rhythmic capacities are made to combine with and finally to dominate its melodic ones. (The entire work and all its rhythmic possibilities develop from a single simple melody played in 7/4 time.) Smadbeck explains that the instruments expressive power lies in its unique combination of percussion and tone: Its struck with a stick, like a drum, while at the same time it possesses the notes of a piano keyboard in a four-to-five octave range. What I love about this piece, says Gramley, is the way the four different mallets seem

almost to be having a conversation with one another. To make sure a listener can fully absorb the four distinct melodic strains, Gramley performs the work at a deliberately slower tempo than other players may choose. But the piece is so vital that no single performance of Rhythm Song including the one captured here can be definitive. In one concert, I may choose to bring out certain melodies and leave others in the background, Gramley explains. In another, I'll decide to bring out different ones. Hell sometimes get listeners ready for Rhythm Song with a performance of Ganda Yina, a traditional African melody arranged for only two mallets by the Ghanaian composer Kakraba Lobi. Drawn into the marimbas luxurious world by that composition, the audience can then double the richness of its experience with the four strains of Smadbecks groundbreaking and now famous work. _____ If any piece in multi-percussions current repertoire can equal the popularity of Rhythm Song, its probably Dave Hollindens Cold Pressed, which performers have flocked to since its Tokyo premier in 1990. The piece requires an even more complicated set-up than Langa Anvil Chorus: nineteen different instruments woods, metals and skins which Gramley arranges on a converted drum-set rack. When I play Cold Pressed, I usually perform it near the end of a program. Numerous times at intermission Ive been asked, When are you going to play the really cool-looking set-up? Hollinden himself is impressed by it: Joe has selected his instruments carefully, and hes created a set-up thats both functional and visually striking. The whole onstage arrangement has a dramatic quality, while it also permits him to play fluidly and forcefully. Born in 1958, Hollinden played bass in several rock bands throughout his teens and twenties, a dimension of his experience thats amply evident in the let-it-rip portions of Cold Pressed. By the late 1980s, the composer was doing graduate study at the University of Michigan, where he met Gramley, who was just turning twenty. The younger man was given the chance to record Hollindens The Whole Toy Laid Down with Michael Udow and the University of Michigans percussion ensemble. Gramley gratefully remembers having the opportunity to get to know Dave and to talk to him about other pieces he was working on. Cold Pressed was being written at the time, and I begged him for a copy. I headed straight to the practice room with it dove right into the work and fell in love with it. Fifteen years later, Gramley remains completely pumped up when he plays the piece, whose title, Hollinden has explained, refers to the method of extracting olive oil that results in the most robust and full-bodied flavor. Syncopation, contrasting timbres and rock-influenced style are blended together in music thats vivid, spicy and obsessively persistent. Gramley makes a point of emphasizing how, even though its a blast to play and almost as much fun for an audience to watch as

to hear Cold Pressed is very deep compositionally. For his part, Hollinden appreciates the superb musicianship that Gramley brings to his much-performed work: Its all too common to consider percussion music to be primarily about how fast you can play and how good your chops are. But what distinguishes a great performance of Cold Pressed from a good one is the ability to digest the phrasing and then articulate it in performance. Each musical ideano matter how short or fragmented, and no matter how it is orchestrated among the various instrumentsneeds to be clearly articulated by the performer if its going to be heard by the listener. And Joes performancea great onetruly accomplishes that. PROGRAM 1. THE ANVIL CHORUS (1991) 7:55 by David Lang (Red Poppy) 2. NAGOYA MARIMBAS (1994) 5:00 by Steve Reich (Hendon Music Inc., a Boosey and Hawkes company) 3. MEDITATION PRELUDES (1977) 11:05 by William Duckworth (Monroe Street Music) 4. RHYTHM SONG (1984) 8:00 by Paul Smadbeck (Mallettech) 5. COLD PRESSED (1990, revised 1994) 8:20 by Dave Hollinden (C. Alan Publications) TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 40:20 PRODUCED BY: JOSEPH GRAMLEY ENGINEERED, EDITED AND MASTERED BY: BILL SEIGMUND, DIGITAL ISLAND STUDIOS, NEW YORK, N.Y. RECORDED APRIL AND MAY 2000 AT HITCHCOCK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, HARTSDALE, N.Y. REISSUED 2006 CD AND GRAPHIC DESIGN BY: ANDREA STABENOW LINER NOTES BY: THOMAS MALLON ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNAUTHORIZED DUPLICATION IS A VIOLATION OF APPLICABLE LAWS. VISIT JOSEPH GRAMLEY ON THE WEB AT WWW.JOSEPHGRAMLEY.COM CONTACT JOSEPH GRAMLEY AT: 324 W. 43rd St., #4A NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036 646-361-3936

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