THE BIG TOP
Concerto for Solo Percussion and Orchestra

A DISSERTATION IN
Music Composition

Presented to the faculty of the University
Of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree.

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

by
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M.M., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2007

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THE BIG TOP
Concerto for Solo Percussion and Orchestra
Federico Jose Garcia-Castells, Candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree
University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2010

ABSTRACT

“The Big Top” is a piece in three movements for symphony orchestra and solo percussionist who is required to play nine different percussion instruments. In the first movement the soloist alternates playing on marimba and non-pitched percussion; the themes presented on the marimba are varied and developed by the soloist as well as the rest of the orchestra and the non-pitched percussion is used in combination with the entire ensemble to create polyrhythms. In the slow second movement the soloist produces unsystematic rhythms using non-pitched percussion exclusively while the orchestra provides a sustained sound texture. In the last movement the soloist uses pitched and non-pitched percussion again; here, the material played by the soloist represents a circus character that has four arms. This movement features an extended percussion solo and the most chromatic musical language in the piece highlighted by final cadential tutti.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music, have examined a thesis titled “The Big Top, Concerto for Solo Percussion and Orchestra” presented by Federico Jose Garcia-Castells, candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTRUMENTATION</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFORMING NOTES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCORE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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THE BIG TOP
Concerto for Solo Percussion and Orchestra

INSTRUMENTATION

2 Flutes
2 Oboes
2 B♭ Clarinets
1 Bass Clarinet in B♭
2 Bassoons
1 Contrabassoon
4 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in C
2 Trombones
1 Tuba
1 Timpani player (4 timpani)

2 Percussionists - Percussionist I:
1 Vibraphone
1 Tam-Tam (large)
1 Suspended Cymbal (Crash)
1 Cowbell (medium)
1 Snare Drum
1 Pair of Congas

- Percussionist II:
1 Cowbell
1 Jamblock or Woodblock
1 Brake Drum
1 Snare Drum
1 Pair of Large Crash Cymbals
1 Tom-Tom 16"
1 Bass Drum

Solo Percussionist:
1 Marimba
2 Suspended Cymbals (Crash and Ride)
1 Cowbell
1 Jamblock or Woodblock
1 Pair of Bongos
2 Tom-Toms (16" and 14")
1 Bass Drum

Violins I
Violins II
Violas
Cellos
Double Basses
The Big Top
Notes

The Big Top evokes a circus performance by an exceptional character that is able to move at extreme speed and precision impressing people by juggling objects and doing tricks that seem beyond human capability. The opening and closing movements of the piece represent two of the main acts of the performance.

There is a variety of styles throughout the piece–Cuban folk music in the first movement, irrational experimental in the second, and rock-music in the third movement. The style diversity happens within each movement as well–besides the Cuban and rock-music styles in the middle sections of the first and last movements, the closing section of both movements have repeated patterns associated with minimalist music.

In the first movement the soloist uses non-pitched percussion (bongos and tom-toms) to produce rhythms with a Latin American-style that evoke the music played by Cuban folk ensembles–traditionally, the leader of these ensembles is a percussionist and one of his distinctive talents is to play at a different tempo from the rest of the ensemble producing polyrhythms. The melodic material of the first movement's closing section evokes a flying trapeze and its ending is not conclusive–it is left open in order to create an expectation to be satisfied by the last movement.

The second movement evokes an introspection of the main performer–in the scene that is represented at this point the main character unintentionally falls asleep as he is waiting backstage between acts. This movement has a slow tempo and is framed by single tam-tam strokes (one at the beginning and one at the end). Here, the orchestra provides a sound texture that evolves gradually from consonant to dissonant as the soloist plays unsystematic material on non-pitched percussion.

The last movement features two percussion solos that represent the main act performed by the main circus character who has four arms. Here, the melodic material evokes circus music from the early 20th century and the style of the percussion solo is similar to that of rock-concert drum solos.
Solo Percussion Instrument list:

1 Marimba
2 Suspended Cymbals (Crash and Ride)
1 Cowbell
1 Jamblock or Woodblock
1 Pair of Bongos
2 Tom-Toms (16" and 14")
1 Bass Drum

Performing Notes (Solo Percussionist):

- The soloist is welcome to wear makeup and/or a costume such as a harlequin, jester, a jester's hat or any circus costume.
- The hardest possible mallets are desired for all the marimba parts.
- All the marimba parts can be played with one pair of mallets but two mallets can be used on the left hand if a softer mallet is necessary for the lower notes.
- All non-pitched percussion can be played with one pair of multi-percussion beaters using the felt side on the bass drum and the wood side on all the other instruments.

Non-Pitched Percussion Key
THE BIG TOP

Perc.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. I

Cl. II

B. Cl.

Tuba

Cbn.

Hg. I

Hg. II

Tpt.

Tbn.

Tuba

 timp.

Vl. I

Vl. II

Vl.

Cell.

D.J.
THE BIG TOP

I
THE BIG TOP

55

Pic.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. I

Cl. II

B. Cl.

Bn.

Cbn.

Hn.

I/ II

Hn.

III/IV

Tpt.

Tbn. I

Tbn. II

Tuba

Timp.

Perc. I

Perc. II

Perc.

Solo

Vl. I

Vl. II

Vla.

Cell.

D.b.
THE BIG TOP

THE BIG TOP
THE BIG TOP
II

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
Cl. I
Cl. II
B. Cl.
Bn.
Cbn.
Hn.
I/ II
Hn.
III/IV
Tpt.
Tbn. I
Tbn. II
Tuba
Timp.
Perc. I
Perc. II
Perc.
Solo
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
Cell.
D.b.

individualy remove mutes

Mute off
### THE BIG TOP

#### II

|-----|----|----|-------|--------|--------|-----|------|-----|--------|------|--------|--------|------|-------|---------|---------|----------|------|-------|------|-------|-----|

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

- Mute on (straight)
- Ride Cymbal (L.V.)
THE BIG TOP

III
THE BIG TOP

III

\( \text{\textcopyright} \)
THE BIG TOP

III

[Sheet music image]

THE BIG TOP

III

[Sheet music image]
THE BIG TOP

III

Pic.
Fl.
Ob.
Cl. I
Cl. II
B. Cl.
Bn.
Cbn.
Hn.
I/II
Hn.
III/IV
Tpt.
Tbn. I
Tbn. II
Tuba
Timp.
Perc. I
Perc. II
Perc.
Solo
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
Cell.
D.b.

66
THE BIG TOP

III
THE BIG TOP

III

Pic.
Fl.
Ob.
Cl. I
Cl. II
B. Cl.
Bn.
Cbn.
Hn.
I/II
Hn.
III/IV
Tpt.
Tbn. I
Tbn. II
Tuba
Timp.
Perc. I
Perc. II
Perc.
Solo
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
Cell.
Db.
THE BIG TOP

III
THE BIG TOP

III

180

THE BIG TOP

III

180

THE BIG TOP

III

180
THE BIG TOP
III
March 31, 2010

Dr. Reynold Simpson  
Conservatory of Music  

Dear Dr. Simpson:

Because his dissertation consists primarily of the score of an original musical composition, Frederico Jose Garcia-Castells may depart somewhat from the campus standards for formatting his dissertation. The following exceptions will be allowed:

1. Bibliographic references may be omitted.
2. No introductory text or narrative will be required beyond that included in his Abstract.

He must, however, meet all other formatting guidelines and include this letter authorizing the above exceptions as an appendix within his dissertation.

Sincerely,

Ronald A. MacQuarrie  
Dean, School of Graduate Studies  

RM:nh  
C: Dr. William Everett
Federico Jose Garcia-Castells was born in Mexico City on January 8th, 1968. He studied drums, percussion, piano, voice, computer music and composition at The National School of Music of The National Autonomous University of Mexico (U.N.A.M.). He graduated in 2003 with a mayor in composition, participated as student at the youth composition seminar injuve 2001 in the cities of Madrid and Malaga in Spain, and in the spring of 2007 obtained a Masters in Music Composition at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.