



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Presents

**Leigh Howard Stevens**

**Percussion**

February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025

7:00 p.m.

Van Cliburn Concert Hall at TCU

**Program**

Time for Marimba (1968)

Minoru Miki  
(1930-2011)

Mini Suite (from Cello Suite III in C major)

J.S. Bach  
(1685-1750)

*Prelude*  
*Sarabande*  
*Allemande*

Houdini's Last Trick (2016)

L.H. Stevens  
(b. 1953)

Once a Drummer . . . (2021-2025)

L.H. Stevens

*World Premiere*

Mr. Stevens performs on a Mallettech marimba of his own design and uses Mallettech mallets exclusively.  
The use of recording equipment or taking photographs is prohibited.  
Please silence all electronic devices including watches, pagers, and phones.

## Program Notes

### Time for Marimba (1968)

There are very few venues where I would dare to begin a marimba recital with a serial / 12-tone composition. But this performance is at a School of Music, largely for musicians. Time for Marimba is also an important work in history of marimba repertoire. Besides all that, I had lunch with Minoru Miki one time in the 1980s! I love this music, and it begins and ends very clearly “in C.” That last fact alone might justify this otherwise risky programming decision. Let’s see if anyone else experiences what I do when the “C of Time” transitions into the “C of Bach.”

The following notes are taken from the Minoru Miki website.

Minoru Miki composed this piece during the summer of 1968 for Keiko Abe's first marimba recital. Critics have said that these events were the crucial starting points in modern marimba history. Before that year, Miki had listened to many marimba performances, but the pieces which he heard were arrangements of famous Western instrumental pieces.

A six tone series consisting of C,B,Eb,G,E,Ab, along with variable quintuplet rhythm constructions are very important to this composition. However, the general atmosphere through the work should be very free, almost like an improvisation. During the 1960's, the marimba had a limited range of just four octaves. If the modern performer wants to play tones in lower octaves, the performer should do so carefully and avoid overuse.

### Bach on the Marimba

In my somewhat prejudiced opinion, the marimba is a superb instrument for the performance of polyphonic baroque music. Imagine a piano with moveable hammers -- one that allows the performer to adjust where the hammer strikes the string. Imagine further that the performer could change hammer hardness and materials at will -- perhaps even control which types of hammers play each voice. Now remove that mechanical contraption that separates the player's hand from the piano's hammers and put the player directly in control, by actually holding the striking implements. Make one last "minor adjustment" to the piano by substituting rosewood bars and resonating tubes for the strings. Our "improved" piano is, of course, a marimba.

Due to Bach's entirely different method of creating multiple voices in the Cello Suites as compared with his keyboard works, there is less basis for using “mixed timbres” of mallets in the Cello Suites, and indeed, I use matched sets of four in two of the three movements.

### Houdini's Last Trick (2016)

The work has only a few kernels of harmonic and melodic material. One of them, used throughout the work, is a kind of “musical illusion” - something I call “faux motion.” It is achieved by passing accents through a sustained chord, producing a false sense of movement and activity, despite the static nature of the harmony and a slow-moving tune. In the initial presentation of the main material, accents are passed through the harmony every group of nine pitches. Later, similar material is treated with what falsely appears to be greater energy and speed by contracting the accent pattern to every seven notes, then five, and finally, late in the work, every three pitches. While Houdini was tragically killed “by a trick gone wrong,” (there is more to that over-simplified myth), I hope you don't feel that Houdini's Last Trick ends badly.

### Once a Drummer . . . (2021 - 2025)

This new work is dedicated to a much better drummer than I ever was, Michael Burritt. It is my hope that he likes it and plays it for many years . . . so I don't have to. There is very limited musical material in the work, but as every trained musician knows, simplicity lends itself to development. After a brief introduction, the work is primarily organized by time signature: A section in 7/8 is followed by one in 6/8 and then in 5/8. After reaching a climax, a truncated recapitulation takes the listener back through those rhythmic modulations a second time. When I wrote my first "serious" marimba piece in the mid-1980s - Rhythmic Caprice – I introduced some new sounds and had fun with my students naming those techniques: "marimshots," stick clicks and splash-clusters. In "OaD" I found some new sounds on the insides and top edges of the decorative "dummy" tubes between each A#-C# and D#-F#, plus a different type of "stick click." Instead of striking the top outer edges of the bars as in Rhythmic Caprice, OaD requires the player to hold the mallet from the "wrong" end and strike the top / normal surface of the bar. This type of stick click allows for more nuance. While these techniques may have been used by other composers previously in a more ad hoc way, in this composition they rise to the level of suggesting an additional "voice." Since I have barely managed to compose the piece (and learned to play it - after a fashion), these techniques have remained unnamed.

## About Leigh Howard Stevens

“The world's greatest classical marimbist... Stevens has revolutionized the playing of the instrument.” —*Time Magazine*

There isn't a single aspect of marimba technique, repertoire or design that has not been profoundly influenced by the work of Leigh Howard Stevens. From “Stevens Grip” to the types of motions used to play the instrument; from the length and material of the mallet handles to the wrapping and stitching of the heads; from the first height-adjustable all wooden marimba frame in the 1980s to the first fully-tunable resonators in the 1990s; from one-handed rolls and baroque ornaments to the use of expressive contrasting roll types; from the early polyphonic Helble Preludes to the works of John Serry, David Maslanka and Joseph Schwantner, to his own original compositions and transcriptions.

Considered “revolutionary” at the time, many of his ideas are now considered to be basic technique, and in fact, have become routine in contemporary marimba compositions and performance. It's no exaggeration to say that Leigh Howard Stevens has been at the very heart of the growth of marimba repertoire, development of its pedagogy, and improvement of the instrument's design over the last 45 years.

This fresh approach to music making on the marimba has greatly expanded the instrument's compositional possibilities, stimulated composer enthusiasm for the marimba's use in solo and chamber music and ultimately led to a series of more than 30 world premiere performances by Mr. Stevens. The first performance of Raymond Helble's Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra by Leigh Howard Stevens and the Denver Symphony in 1980 was a milestone in the development of marimba literature. His digitally recorded all-Bach album has been greeted with rave reviews for its artistry by magazines as diverse as *Stereophile* and *Billboard*.

Devoted marimba lovers have sprung up all over the world – both players and the general public – converted by Leigh Howard Stevens' solo recitals, hundreds of college campus appearances, concertos with symphony orchestra, European concert tours, masterclasses and radio and television appearances both here and abroad. He has been featured in *Time Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and appeared on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, and *Voice of America's* internationally broadcast, *New York, New York*. His celebrated musicianship, imaginative programming and exciting performances have inspired critical acclaim and standing ovations in 48 states in the USA and in 18 foreign countries. Mr. Stevens introduced the marimba to The People's Republic of China in a televised performance in 1994 that reportedly reached an audience of 80 million viewers.

Mr. Stevens is the founder and chief creative force behind Mallettech, the world leader in design and manufacturing of keyboard percussion instruments used by professional percussionists. He has been awarded eleven U.S. Patents for musical instrument design. In addition to the 5-octave Mallettech Imperial Grand Marimba that he performs on, he also led the creative team that developed the company's game-changing Omega Vibe and Love Vibe. Mr. Stevens taught for many years at the Royal Academy of Music in London, England, where he was Professor of Marimba. He was elected to the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in 2006.

Leigh Howard Stevens' repertoire ranges from Renaissance music and the Preludes and Fugues of J. S. Bach, to original marimba works written by contemporary composers expressly for him. Many of these original compositions were considered too challenging, both technically and musically, to be performed by solo marimbists until the development of Mr. Stevens' new system of four-mallet technique. Percussionists and marimbists, the world over, have adopted his revolutionary approach to 4-mallet technique, as set forth in his ground-breaking book, *Method of Movement*, which has been published in six languages.

Mr. Stevens can be heard on past releases of the Delos, Musical Heritage Society, Musicmasters and CRI record labels, as well as current releases on Resonator Records.