

## Getting a College Teaching Job: The Interview Recital J. B. Smith

To attract the attention of a university search committee, numerous qualities must be displayed in an applicant's dossier and during the interview. Performance experience, pedigree, teaching background, professional vision, publication record, recruiting success, conducting skills, public speaking abilities and a successful interview are all important factors. Regardless, the performance component of an applied faculty candidate's site visit weighs heavily on the final ranking of the applicants. Not only does the performance have to be compelling and polished, the repertoire must resonate with the search committee members. The job description usually gives clear indications of the instrumental and artistic expectations of the position. An assistant band director position with percussion specialization will require a different audition repertory than a studio instructor position at a conservatory. The literature choice should match the job description.

University music programs are different. Curricular emphasis, size of undergraduate and graduate programs, the number of percussion positions within the faculty and internal traditions determine the skill sets required for the position. The repertoire is frequently left up to the discretion of the applicants but occasionally specific pieces are required.

All musicians have stylistic preferences—we cannot deflect our musical personality to adhere to the predilections of a group of musicians who will be charged with recommending a person to fill a faculty vacancy, however, there should be consideration for the wide spectrum of expectations and inclinations that will be encountered.

A university search committee is typically assembled by a school's director, dean, or chair to create a representative collection of faculty who will be impacted directly by the hire. For a percussion position, the search committee will often be comprised of the athletic band director, orchestra director, wind band director, Jazz director, and/or representatives from music education, composition, and ethnomusicology. Depending on the size of the program, the prescribed procedure for selection of search committee members and the structure of the unit there will also be representation from other areas: woodwinds, brass, voice, keyboard, music history and music theory. Student representation is also common. At smaller schools, non-musicians may be involved. Regardless, a wide range of musical tastes will be represented on the committee. Applicants have to construct a recital program that will demonstrate abilities on the various percussion instruments but also present compositions that "catch the ear" of the committee.

I asked a number of percussion faculty who have been hired over the past several years to share the repertoire list from their audition recitals and offer the reasoning behind their choice of compositions. Were specific pieces prescribed? Did they adjust the program for the particular job? Did they emphasize their instrumental

strengths or demonstrate versatility? Answers to these and other questions below may offer aspiring percussion faculty guidelines in preparing their own auditions.

The following responded to my invitation to contribute to the article:

Greg Beyer (Northern Illinois University), Kevin Bobo (University of Indiana), Michael Burritt (Eastman School of Music), Thomas Burritt (University of Texas), Brett Dietz (Louisiana State University), Kristopher Keeton (University of North Carolina—Greensboro), Michael G. Kingan (Indiana University of Pennsylvania), Payton MacDonald (William Paterson University), Todd Meehan (Baylor University), Morris Palter (University of Alaska-Fairbanks), John W. Parks IV (Florida State University), and Svetoslav Stoyanov (University of Miami). The sample pool is too small to make broad conclusions but there are clear indications of artistic mastery and instrumental diversity.

As expected, their auditions demonstrated virtuosic versatility. Audition content varied by individual and institution but there were similarities: all performed demanding literature for keyboard percussion, Elliott Carter's timpani solos were popular, Jacques Delecluse snare drum etudes appeared on several programs and excerpts from the orchestral literature were often presented. Programs with more than one percussion faculty allowed applicants to demonstrate specialized skills. Schools requiring jazz, ethnomusicology and/or marching band responsibilities dictated performance of music from those areas. Composer-performers either highlighted or de-emphasized their original compositions depending on the situation. Most presented multiple percussion solos.

## Interview Recital Repertoire

### Keyboard Literature

An obvious trend with university hirings is the success of percussionists with stellar keyboard percussion skills in acquiring jobs. Some of the more prominent positions have recently been filled by percussionists who are distinguished practitioners on the marimba: Kevin Bobo (University of Indiana), Michael Burritt (Eastman School of Music), Thomas Burritt (University of Texas), Mark Ford (University of North Texas), Svetoslav Stoyanov, (University of Miami) and She-e Wu (Northwestern University). It makes sense that the marimba, and pitched percussion in general, can impress a broad audience, including non-percussionists who serve on search committees.

### Marimba

*Cello Suite No. 1* (selections)—J. S. Bach  
*Chorale*—J. S. Bach, trans Michael Burritt  
*The Marriage of the Lamb*—Kevin Bobo  
*Prelude 2*—Brett William Dietz

*Reflections on the Nature of Water*—Jacob Druckman  
*Dances of Earth and Fire*—Peter Klatzow  
*Forsythian Spring*—Christopher S. Norton  
*Rhyme or Reason*—Eugene O'Brien  
*Electric Counterpoint III*—Steve Reich  
*Caméléon*—Eric Sammut  
*Rotation No. 2*—Eric Sammut  
*Six Elegies Dancing*—Jennifer Stasack  
*Rhythmic Caprice*—Leigh Howard Stevens  
*Rumble Strips*—Gordon Stout  
*Merlin*—Andrew Thomas  
*Khan Variations*—Alejandro Viñao

#### Vibraphone

*Interzones*—Bruce Hamilton

#### Xylophone

*Girlfriends Medley*—Bob Becker

*Mighty Lak' a Rose*—Ethelbert Nevin, Arr. Bob Becker

#### Multiple Percussion Solos

Complex multiple percussion solos were included in several of the interview recitals. Given the travel and time restrictions confronted in an interview process, small setup pieces were preferred.

*Emporia Toast*—Brett William Dietz

*Ti-Re-Ti-Ke Dha*—James Dillon

*Bone Alphabet*—Brian Ferneyhough

*Toucher*—Vinko Globokar

*XY*—Michael Gordon

*Concerto for Percussion (III.)*—Joseph Schwantner

*Rogosanti*—James Wood

*Rebonds B*—Iannis Xenakis

The Florida State audition didn't require a multiple percussion solo. John Parks described the performance as half recital/ half mock audition. Neither was a multi solo included on the audition recital at Indiana University since the job is primarily a marimba position.

Brett Dietz wrote *Emporia Toast* for the interview at Louisiana State University (his solution to the preference for a small setup piece) and also presented his *Prelude 2* for marimba. He describes the reasoning: "In terms of the interview process, I informed the committee that I was a composer and that I intended to keep pursuing that aspect of my career. It's worked out fine and I'm close colleagues with the other

composer on campus.” Payton MacDonald, interviewing at William Paterson University, had a different approach. “Although I have a dual career as a composer/performer I didn’t play any of my own music. Sometimes composition faculty are territorial and I didn’t want them to think I had designs on teaching composition (I don’t anyway).” Greg Beyer played drumset on an original tune, *Just Do It*, with an NIU student combo and presented one movement from his *Bahian Counterpoint for Berimbau*. In spite of his copious output as a composer, Michael Burritt did not present any of his original works for the Eastman interview recital.

### Timpani Solos

As should be expected, Elliot Carter’s solos for timpani were popular choices for interview auditions. Of the 12 faculty polled, 7 presented Carter solos.

*Sonata for 3 Unaccompanied Kettledrums*—Daniel Jones  
*Canaries, March, Improvisation*—Elliott Carter  
*Raga*—William Cahn  
*Etude #11 (from Vingt Etudes)*—Jacques Delecluse

### Snare Drum Literature

Concert and rudimental snare drum solos were presented. As seen below, selections from Jacques Delecluse’s *Douze Etudes* were frequently programmed. Though not required, Kevin Bobo included a Delecluse etude on his marimba recital to demonstrate versatility.

Concert Snare Drum  
*Douze Etudes (1, 3, 6, 9, 10)*—Jacques Delecluse  
*Advanced Snare Drum Studies #1 and #5*—Mitchell Peters  
*Prim*—Askel Mason

Rudimental Snare Drum  
*Africa Hot*—John Wooton  
*Gingersnap, Pine Cone Forest*—John S. Pratt  
*Heating the Rudiments (from Rudimental Swing Solos)*—Charley Wilcoxon  
*Downfall Variation*—James Campbell

### Drum Set Performances

Four from the pool played drum set for their audition. For his University of Texas interview, Tom Burritt played drums with members of the jazz faculty on one tune. “This was totally spontaneous and was decided during an earlier interview when discussing the importance of being well rounded!” For his performance at Indiana

University of Pennsylvania, Michael Kingan presented an arrangement of David Schmalenberger's *I Remember* in which he added some African sounds, drums, and bells to make it a multiple percussion/world music demonstration. Kris Keeton played various styles for his audition at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. As mentioned above, Greg Beyer played drumset with a group of students at Northern Illinois.

### World Percussion Demonstrations

Several faculty included world percussion performances into their audition recital. Payton MacDonald performed a traditional tabla solo. Svetoslav Stoyanov included some world drumming in his University of Miami program. Greg Beyer played two pieces for berimbau and a pandiero solo with a student pan player. Kris Keeton arranged John Bergamo's *Piru Bole* for a world percussion multi setup. Morris Palter presented Javier Alvarez's *Temazcal* for maracas and electronics for his University of Alaska-Fairbanks interview.

### Orchestral Excerpts

Standard orchestral repertoire was offered in seven of the audition recitals. John Parks performed his entire program from memory with the excerpts played with cued recordings to put them in context.

#### Xylophone and Bells

*Porgy and Bess*—George Gershwin

*Firebird*—Igor Stravinsky

*Oiseaux Exotiques*—Olivier Messiaen

*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*—Paul Dukas

*An American in Paris*—George Gershwin

*Fiesta del Pacifico*—Roger Nixon

#### Snare Drum

*Capriccio Espagnol*—Rimsky-Korsakov

#### Tambourine

*Carnival Overture*—Antonin Dvorak

#### Timpani

*Symphony No. 5, 7, and 9*—Ludwig van Beethoven

*Concerto For Seven Winds, Timpani and Strings*—Frank Martin

*Fiesta del Pacifico*—Roger Nixon

#### Bass Drum

*Rite of Spring, Movt. 1*—Igor Stravinsky

## Cymbals

*Romeo and Juliet*—Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

In addition to the lists of repertoire presented at their interview recitals, those who contributed to this article offered other suggestions for those who aspire to become college instructors. John Parks recommends:

1. Memorize the committee members' bios.
2. Find out what music the students are playing (through internet searches, recital programs, MySpace, etc.) so you can anticipate what pieces you might encounter in an open lesson. Also, you can refer to them by name, rather than by instrument in a lesson or conducting situation.
3. Don't ask questions that can be answered beforehand (information about scholarships, salary, tenure requirements is usually posted online).
4. Always wear some really sharp clothes and bring a bottle of water--the water is not only to stay hydrated during a busy day, but also to stall if I need a second to gather thoughts while answering a question.
5. Bring a professionally printed and bound interview appendix--about 30 copies. This should contain lists of student achievements (festival participation, awards, graduate fellowships, etc.), resume/vita, syllabi, recruiting strategies (state, regional, national), articles, and anything else you might want to use or point to during the interview.
6. Practice—out loud—the teaching portions of the interview, trying to anticipate students who will A) be open to suggestion, B) be rude or unprofessional/unwilling to try, and everything in between, so that you're not caught by surprise.
7. Anticipate and answer (out loud, and repeatedly) every question you can possibly imagine being asked—recruiting questions, goals, philosophy, vision for the program, mission of the school, music education vs. performance, job market, etc.

University teaching jobs are highly coveted. The competition is intense and the pool of qualified applicants grows every year. The recommendations above will help potential faculty applicants prepare for and stand out in an interview.