

Dreams

Stephen Stone & Friends

Dreams

What is your dream?



At any given time, each of us has a collection of hopes for the future – some are so big that we call them dreams. Like the fleeting images that drift through our minds while we sleep, some of our dreams for the future stay with us and some change over time. While some remain distant and out of reach, hard work and the involvement of supportive people help some dreams become reality.

Once, I thought of my first album of marimba music as a dream for the future. Now that it's complete, it is a snapshot of the past: who I was, the challenges I faced, the people I could collaborate with and the resources available to me at the time. It's also, I see with the benefit of hindsight, an artifact of a true dream I had: to become a musician.

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The marimba is uncommon in my part of the world, and its music arouses curiosity. I'm often asked how I came to play it.

When I took private piano lessons as a child, working through to grade four with the Royal Conservatory of Music, music was one of my many interests.

Drums caught my attention when a junior high band visited my elementary school in northern Alberta. Sitting cross-legged on the gym floor with my classmates, I was mesmerized by the beat, the energy, the rhythm and the coordination of the drum set.

I soon enrolled in school band programs, playing snare drum and then drum set. After some years of private drum lessons and experience in school band programs, I was convinced that a drummer must also be a percussionist, playing anything that can be hit, shaken or scraped. As I practiced and learned more about percussion instruments in high school, I expanded and deepened my involvement with music to include piano-shaped mallet percussion instruments, including two-mallet xylophone.

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Even still, drums remained my favourite. So much so, that I had mixed feelings about my decision to follow my hometown friends to the nearest large city, Edmonton, and enrol in the University of Alberta (U of A).

The U of A curriculum includes a range of classical percussion, but I had also imagined continued growth on drum set. While I worried that I had made a mistake, I grew to admire myriad percussion instruments. It was at the U of A that I really came to know and develop a relationship with the marimba.

In my first year there, I learned some basic four-mallet technique that allowed me to play chords and slightly more technical marimba music. In my second year, I progressed to some simple marimba solos.

Even so, and despite significant improvement in my musical skills, I felt inadequate. Other musicians, especially those who came from more musical backgrounds, seemed more naturally talented than me and achieved faster results for their efforts than I did.

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In my third year of university, despite my self-doubt, I pushed myself to compete in the University of Alberta Academy Strings Concerto Competition. I performed Ney Rosauero's *Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra*, the most popular marimba concerto in the world, by memory.

This large, 32-page solo was the first marimba piece I memorized. By the time I performed it, I had invested at least 150 hours in practice. The mental and physical effort required to learn and play it was beyond anything I'd done before.

While the process was daunting, the preparation for and performance of that concerto was a turning point in my musical journey – for my career and my self-confidence. And I won! Winning the competition gave me some musical credibility and, more importantly, convinced me that I could be a musician.

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With more confidence and a newfound liking for concerti, I took on another challenge the following year: the University of Alberta Symphonic Winds Concerto Competition. I assembled a percussion group and spent hundreds of hours practicing and memorizing a unique concerto: *Rosewood Dreaming* by Bill Cahn, with whom I had studied at his Creative Music Making Workshop at the Toronto NEXUS Summer Music Academy in 2006.

This challenging concerto, written for marimba and supporting percussion ensemble with the option of being augmented by wind ensemble, won the competition.

The music represented a beautiful moment in time, and I longed to be able to appreciate it beyond the moment.

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Each piece on this album has as a similar beginning, having been performed originally at a memorable event in a unique context by talented people working together for the occasion. I dreamt of capturing all of these pieces, performed by friends and colleagues, to be enjoyed for all time.

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I also dreamt of owning a marimba, which would give me some musical freedom that I was missing.

Knowing that I would interact with it for countless hours, I spent a lot of time considering which marimba would suit me best. One can learn only so much over the internet, however. So, in 2008, I went to the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Austin, Texas, to choose a marimba brand.

After talking to multiple manufacturers and testing dozens of instruments, I decided on a model made by a Japanese company called Korogi.

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In 2009, just as my skills were developing and confidence was increasing, I put my marimba practice on hold for a year to teach English in South Korea. A part of me felt anxious for this pause in my musical growth, but it was necessary. Teaching English rounded out my professional skills and allowed me to save money to buy my marimba. It was also musically advantageous: while immersed in Korean culture, I expanded my musical repertoire by learning Samulnori, which is traditional Korean percussion music.

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Also, I found an opportunity to travel to the Korogi marimba factory. Located in the small town of Sabae, Japan, between mountains and surrounded by fields of rice, it was magical.

The owner and I shared sushi before touring the factory and discussing the instruments. I enjoyed my glimpse at the art involved with the creation of the marimba, and I felt confident that I had chosen the right instrument for me. Visiting the place where my instrument was made was meaningful, and the experience deepened my relationship with the instrument I bought while I was there.

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For me, having my own marimba, with the freedom it provides to practice and perform on my own schedule, and releasing this CD, which I produced with the help of many valued friends, marked an arrival point in my journey to become a musician. Of course, the need for growth with any skillset or art never ends.

While the music on this CD reflects who I was when it was recorded, it also hints at the musician I have become, the musical adventures I am now pursuing and the exciting music in my future.

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Performing the album's first track, *Folie à Deux* for an Alberta Art Days event in 2011 at the Stanley Milner Library, downtown Edmonton.

Folie à Deux by Ryan Purchase.

Stephanie Geary : clarinet

Stephen Stone: marimba

Excerpt from Ryan:

I was thinking about the influence of dreams and I started thinking more about waking hallucinations... there's a disorder called Folie à Deux which describes a specific hallucination shared by two people (who know each other and back up each others' perspective). 'Hallucination' implies more movement than 'dream' to me, a little more frightening, a little more panicked and frantic. But not nightmarish.

Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers, by Guillaume Laroche.

Dennis Arseneau: piano

Ryan Hemphill: vibraphone, xylophone, woodblocks, cymbal

Brady Sherard: piano, celesta

Stephen Stone: marimba, woodblocks, glockenspiel, xylophone, gong, triangle

Wendy Grasdahl: conductor

Excerpt from Guillaume:

This work was inspired by three 16th century paintings that depict Asian landscapes. The individual movements' titles are my own and reflect captions I personally attribute to the paintings. The piece uses an imagined Asian-esque musical language which mixes freely with more conventionally western harmonies and processes. Movement 1 emphasizes mellow metallic timbres. Movement 2 features mostly drier, struck wooden sounds. Movement 3 combines both sound auras, juxtaposing marimba and celesta melodies.

Rosewood Dreaming, by *William L Cahn*

Jenna Anderson: vibraphone

Tina Chia: marimba

Reg Khachonoski: marimba

Dave Meagher: glockenspiel, tom-toms,
cymbal

Francis Tenorio: marimba, tom-toms,
cymbal

Stephen Stone: marimba solo

Thanks to everyone involved in putting together this project and everyone listening for sharing in the experience! Special thanks to my parents Garry and Carole for your support and to Brian and Geoff for your percussion influence. Making a CD is a team effort and I am grateful to everyone involved in realizing this Dream!

-Stephen

Excerpt from William:

Rosewood is the natural material from which marimba bars —with their warm and resonant tones – are made. Dreaming is a state in which thoughts and images pass freely through the mind, sometimes following a logical, orderly flow and sometimes making illogical connections. Anything may seem possible. Meanings are personal and ultimately drawn from one's own reflection. However, words from a familiar children's song are appropriate: "... life is but a dream".

1. Folie à Deux 7:44 *by Ryan Purchase*
2. Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers *by Guillaume Laroche*
One Boat 4:30
One Village 4:30
Two Boats 4:51
3. Rosewood Dreaming *by William L Cahn*
I. 5:17
II. 7:12
III. 9:50

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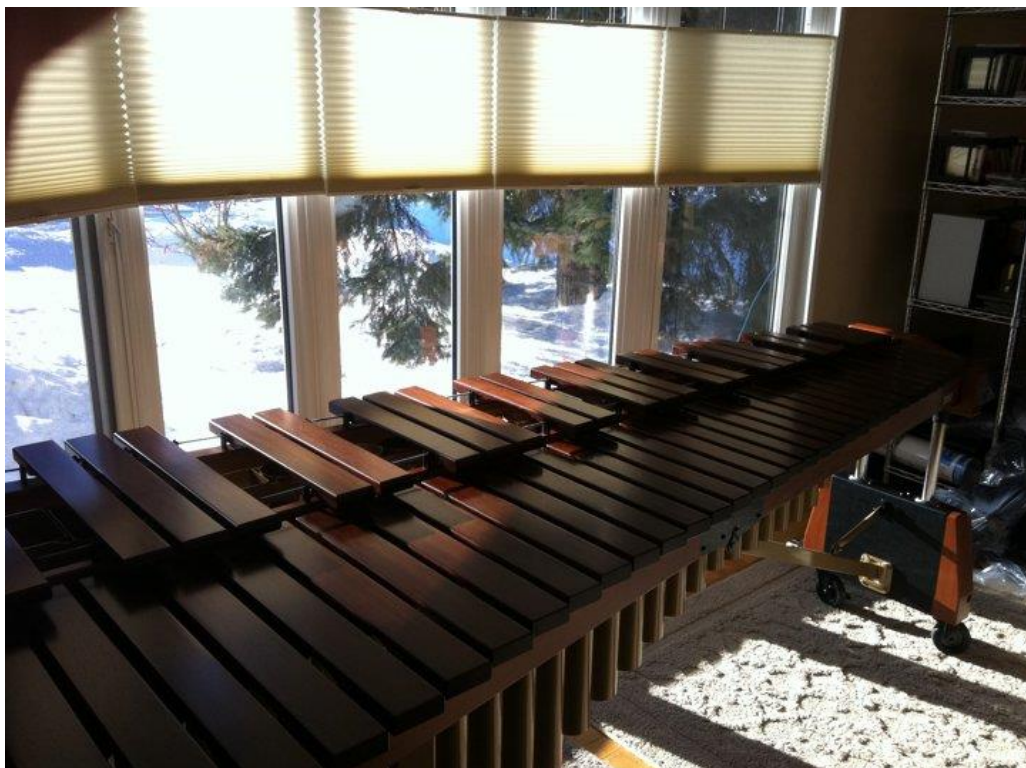
Recording *Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, 2009,
in Convocation Hall, University of Alberta.
The second piece recorded in the album.



Setup for *Rosewood Dreaming*, 2009, for a
pre-symphony performance at the Winspear Centre,
downtown Edmonton. Last on the album,
this was the first piece recorded.



The Korogi Marimba Factory in Sabae Japan, amidst the fields of rice.



My new instrument in my parent's living room,
in 2011, after returning from South Korea.