



A Question & Answer Session with Musician Christopher Wilson

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By: Dr. Gabrielle Baffoni

Christopher Wilson is a fast-rising artist who has appeared as a soloist, chamber musician and clinician throughout the United States. As a soloist Mr. Wilson has helped to introduce the marimba to public audiences outside of the concert hall, and he will continue this path at the Arts Council of Southeast Missouri on July 1st, 2016 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.! In a recent interview with Dr. Gabrielle Baffoni, Arts Council Board Member and Instructor of Music at Southeast Missouri State University, Mr. Wilson expanded on his role as a musician performing in different settings.

GB: You are a proponent of bringing marimba performance to the public, outside of the traditional concert hall. Why is this important to you? What challenges do non-traditional performance spaces present? What advantages do they present?

CW: It started as something of a necessity, and quickly grew into a passion of mine. In the initial years after completing my Master's degree it took time before I began to find opportunities to perform solo recitals in traditional settings. Because performing is so vital to my identity as a musician, I created opportunities to play the marimba, but they were mostly in informal settings (including nursing homes, schools, libraries, hospitals, coffee shops, etc.). I still find a great amount of joy introducing both the marimba and classical music to a variety of public settings. In some cases, like performing at nursing homes and retirement communities, it feels as much like community outreach as it does performance.

The biggest challenge I find is in repertoire selection. The marimba is capable of being rather loud and abrasive, but it can also be a calm and soothing instrument. For a concert in an informal setting, like say in a coffee shop, I have to coordinate music appropriate for an audience that is not only in attendance to listen, but to also eat and converse.

GB: How do you select solo repertoire for performance? How does your repertoire choices change depending on the setting of the performance?

CW: I personally prefer to perform original compositions for the marimba, as opposed to arrangements or transcriptions. However, when performing for an event like First Friday, throwing in arrangements of more well-known classical works can help spice up the concert. Adding a few easier transcriptions can also help with the depth needed to perform on such a lengthy event.

GB: Do you prepare differently for performances in a non-traditional setting?

CW: When playing a formal solo recital, I will prepare forty-five to fifty-five minutes of music. However, when playing in a non-traditional setting I am often asked to perform anywhere from two to four hours. When practicing for an event such as this, it is important that I am not only prepared to perform with excellence, but that my endurance is where it needs to be.

GB: You are currently working on a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Percussion Performance. In what area are you conducting your dissertation research?

CW: I am researching percussion pedagogy in beginning to intermediate students. I am mainly concerned with diversifying skill sets on multiple instruments, and the development of technical skills on those instruments.

GB: In addition to percussion performance, you have also studied wind conducting. Does this inform your work as a performer? In what ways?

CW: My studies as a conductor, my studies as an orchestral percussionist, and my general love of all music by non-percussionists have all greatly informed my work as a performer. I often try to approach the marimba as anything but a percussion instrument. For example, I often ask how would a wind instrument approach this section of a work? What articulations would they use? How can I emulate that? In works where I am providing every layer, from accompaniment to melody, I ask how I would balance an ensemble performing something similar, and how I can emulate that on my instrument.

GB: Is there a particular piece, composer, or musician that has been inspiring or unforgettable to you over the course of your career so far?

CW: If you visit my website, you can view a performance of Ney Rosuaro's Marimba Concerto No. 1. I first learned the finale to this work for two competitions the Junior year of my Bachelor's degree, both of which I won. As a result of winning one competition,

I had the opportunity to perform the movement with the Spokane Symphony. The assistant director was so taken by the piece that I was asked to perform the movement again with the symphony on an outreach concert at the Spokane Indian Reservation. When I returned to school for my Doctorate, it seemed fitting that I compete on the entire piece for the Rocky Mountain competition, which I ended up winning. Not only has that work seen me through many stages of my development as a musician, I think it is one of the absolute best marimba concertos ever written.

Chris Wilson will perform at the Arts Council of Southeast Missouri, located at 16 North Spanish Street, Suite B, on Friday, July 1st from 6:00 – 8:00 pm.

For more information on Chris Wilson, please visit: www.wilsonmarimba.com

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