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Finding Meaning in Detachment: An Analysis of Kevin Volans' Asanga

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FINDING MEANING IN DETATCHMENT:
AN ANALYSIS OF KEVIN VOLANS' ASANGA

Jordan Taylor Walsh

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

FINDING MEANING IN DETATCHMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF KEVIN
VOLANS' *ASANGA*

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE HONORS COLLEGE
FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF MUSIC IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE
COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

BY

JORDAN TAYLOR WALSH

COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

2016

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FINDING MEANING IN DETACHEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF KEVIN

VOLANS' ASANGA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the undeniable importance of Kevin Volans' music, there has been little academic research done on his work. This is especially true of his pieces for percussion. This paper both dissects the form and structure Volans' piece for multiple percussion *Asanga* and explores the different interpretations by players from around the world that have contributed to the accepted performance practice for the piece. The ultimate goal of this project is to achieve a detailed understanding of how *Asanga* works and record this knowledge for the benefit of any future percussionists who add the piece to their repertoire.

INDEX WORDS: *Asanga*, Kevin Volans, Multiple Percussion, Multi-percussion

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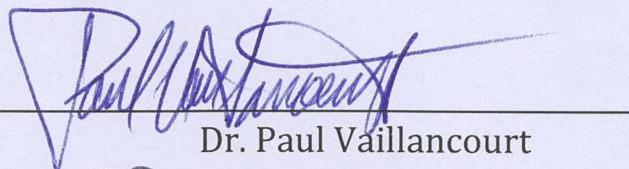
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Finding Meaning in Detachment:
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Jordan Taylor Walsh

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements of the Honors College
for Honors in the Degree of
Bachelor of Music in Music Performance
College of the Arts
Columbus State University

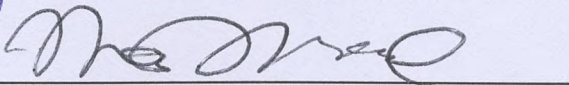
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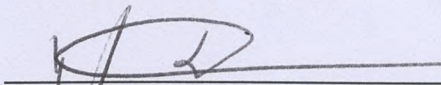
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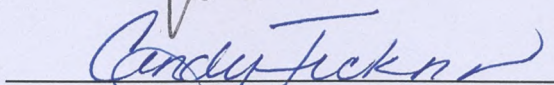
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The problem of interpretation permeates all academic music. Issues of function within the music, as well as external forces acting upon the composer such as his or her intentions, place in history, and outside influences, are critical to the preparation of nearly all serious compositions. Performers often solve these issues by reading any accompanying text by the composer and studying the score. What is a musician to do, then, when the composer offers no guidance, or even states that there is no deeper meaning under the notes that he or she has written? Problems such as these exist in Kevin Volans' multiple-percussion work *Asanga* and can fortunately be addressed with a detailed analysis. This paper will explore connections between sections, instrument choices, structural points, and as a result achieve a deeper understanding of this piece that claims not to have any deeper meaning.

Kevin Volans was born in 1949 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa to Eunice and Jack Volans, who owned a local dry cleaner. He proved to be an intelligent child, excelling in English and math as well as quickly mastering the piano (by his twentieth birthday he had already performed several concerti with the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra). He enrolled at the University of Natal in 1967 and began studies in both engineering and architecture but ultimately decided to pursue music as a career and auditioned for the music department of the University of the Witwatersrand in 1968.¹

During his time at Witwatersrand, Volans studied primarily with Geoffrey Chew, June Schneider, and on occasion Peter Klatzow. However, it would be in 1970 that Volans

¹ Lucia, Christine. "Celebrating Composer Kevin Charles Volans, B. 1949." *Musicus* 37.1 (2009): 3-18. Web. 13 Oct. 2015.

made one of his most important contacts, Karlheinz Stockhausen. The two first met in Johannesburg, where Stockhausen was giving a lecture at the South African Broadcasting Corporation for the Johannesburg Music Society. Volans attended this lecture, and recalls it as follows:

He had such powers, almost like mass hypnosis ... Certainly the other students, other members of my class who were really anti-Stockhausen, came out of that [first] lecture and ran up Eloff Street jumping over the parking meters, and were so excited they were saying, 'we're going to go back, we haven't got tickets but we're going to go to every lecture'. We all did, and they were something, they were just phenomenal. That's when I decided I'd like to study with Stockhausen.²

Volans' work is notable for its unconventional integration of European and African aesthetics. In some of his earlier work, the two were integrated through borrowing existing African material and expanding it using European compositional techniques, as he did in his withdrawn piece *Mbira* (1981); other times he would as little as the title from the African tradition, such as in *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*. In his own words:

I wanted to reflect in the music an image of a multicultural society –one in which the traditions of different cultures are represented honoured and, above all, shared – no more separate development! In order to achieve this I planned a series of pieces which were graded as a learning curve from pure transcription (in the manner of Bach), through paraphrase (as in Liszt), quotation and objet trouvé, assimilation (in the tradition of Stravinsky and Bartok) to what was then called an invented folklore - what I thought of as a new music of southern Africa.²

Volans first engaged with multiple percussion composition in 1985, completing the work *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*. The work was written for renowned percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky, who premiered it at the Museum Carolino Augusteum in October of 1985. The inspiration for the work comes from the traditional African song of

² Lucia, Christine. "Celebrating Composer Kevin Charles Volans, B. 1949." *Musicus* 37.1 (2009): 3-18. Web. 13 Oct. 2015.

the same name. Interestingly, the meaning of the name is lost in translation, and a more accurate translation would be “she who sleeps alone” or “she who sleeps without a lover”.³

While Volans’ used the traditional African song for inspiration, he did not let the preexisting music take prominence in the composition. By distancing himself from the heritage of the source material, Volans allows his own writing to take the spotlight, and for the African dance to fade into the background. Because of this, the only truly African thing about the work is the title, with the actual music sounding almost entirely Western to the untrained ear.

Volans also makes the point that *She Who Sleeps* acted as a compositional exercise for him. By only including drums in the setup, he was forced to create interest in ways that he had not previously conceived of, as the absence of any traditional melodic material made many of his preferred compositional techniques irrelevant. The only exception to this is the coda, which is played on the marimba.³

Like *She Who Sleeps*, *Asanga* was dedicated to percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky, who premiered it on September 30 1998 in Fylkingen, Stockholm. The title directly translates to “freedom from attachment”, and Volans wrote it for her as a gift on the occasion of her father’s death. The implication here is clear: *Asanga* was written to help Schulkowsky cope with a tragic loss. When one knows this, musical connections begin to appear. The piece gives little in terms of dynamic markings, with the exception of diminuendos on quintuplet passages and dynamic markings at the beginnings of sections. If

³ Volans, Kevin. *She Who Sleeps With a Small Blanket*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1985. Print.

played exactly as written, several parts of the piece take on a drone-like quality, and sound almost numb to the outside world and its influences.

It is interesting to note how this supposed freedom from attachment translates differently for the composer and the performer. In Volans' case, the freedom could mean several things. Recalling that his first multiple percussion piece *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* was, in a sense, a compositional exercise in writing without melodic instruments, it can be theorized that for Volans, the freedom from attachment is actually a freedom from melody and harmony. Looking at his educational background, however, another interesting point appears: Volans was a student of Stockhausen and to a lesser extent of Klatzow, two composers who wrote music with extremely strict parameters, in some cases going as far as total serialism. In this context, Volans' freedom is from form: *Asanga* purports to have no traditional form, and in comparison to the extreme levels of control that his teachers called for, it can be said that organization is the exact thing that he is free of.

On the other hand, due to the open nature of the piece the player cannot possibly achieve the same level of detachment that the composer did. As with any piece of written music, there are choices to be made regarding interpretation, phrasing, and direction; these decisions are even more prevalent in percussion pieces with open instrumentation like *Asanga*. Because of the highly personal nature of musical interpretation, learning the piece inherently attaches the player to the music. While the intention of the composer is to give freedom, acceptance, and closure, players can never truly feel this sense of detachment because they have made the piece their own simply by learning it.

The instrumentation of *Asanga*, and for that matter all of Volans' pieces for multiple-percussion, identifies as what percussionist Steve Schick would call second-generation

percussion music. The first generation is defined by large and problematic set-ups, and includes pieces like John Cage's *27'10.554"*, Charles Wuorinen's *Janissary Music*, and Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Zyklus*. Schick likens this overabundance of implements to the romantic orchestra, and suggests that these early composers were influenced by the size and range of sound possibilities of these groups. The following example illustrates the set-up of one of the most famous first generation compositions, Luciano Berio's *Circles*.⁴

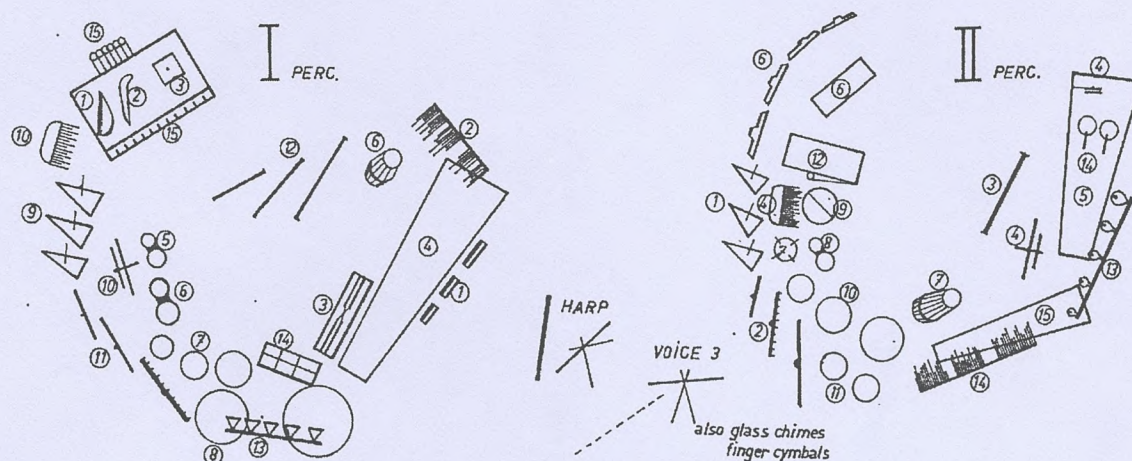


Figure 1: Set-Up for Circles, by Luciano Berio: a First Generation Composition

In contrast, this second generation of composers writes for much smaller instrument groups, significantly limiting sound possibilities for both practical and focus related reasons. Examples from this generation include Brian Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet*, David Lang's *The Anvil Chorus*, Vinko Globokar's *Toucher*, and of course Kevin Volans' *Asanga*. A defining aspect of this style of writing is open instrumentation: allowing the percussionist a certain level of control over sounds by only specifying general instrument groups.

⁴ Shick, Steven. *The Percussionists' Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2006. Print.

Figure II: *Bone Alphabet*, by Brian Ferneyhough: a Second Generation Composition⁵

Asanga is a prime example of this: Volans' only specifies a desire for "Four low drums (including bass drum) and two higher tom-toms, plus two high metal plates or extremely high skins".⁶ This ambiguity of implements leaves the player to decide exactly what kind of sound he or she wants.

Four low drums (including bass drum) and two higher tom-toms, plus two high metal plates or extremely high skins.

Figure III: *Specific instrument requests in Asanga*⁷

Despite the open nature of the piece, one aspect of the instrumentation seems to be constant. While there is no specific request in the score for them, it has become performance practice to use congas for the skinned drums. The reasoning behind this is

⁵ Ferneyhough, Brian. *Bone Alphabet*. London: Edition Peters, 1991. Print.

⁶ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

⁷ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

clear: congas offer a distinct attack as well as a reasonably deep tone, which balances both the need for depth in the writing and the need to be able to hear each attack clearly. Some players substitute the top drums for low-pitched bongos, but it is rare to find a recording where congas are not used.

One of the most common liberties taken in terms of instrumentation is with the toms. Percussionists like Kai-Po Lan, Andrew Fuhrman, and Sindre Sætre have all recorded the piece and completely omitted the toms, replacing them with either congas or bongos. While this sound is more uniform and helps to bring out accent patterns more clearly, it makes the bass drum stand out because its timbre differs greatly from the hand drums in the rest of the setup. To mitigate this, many percussionists who opt to replace the toms also replace the bass drum, and instead use a slightly muffled floor tom.⁸⁹¹⁰ While this sound is closer to the hand drums, it still causes a disconnect, and it sacrifices much of the depth that the bass drum would create. After experiments with different drums, I personally found that my preferred setup for *Asanga* is a pair of double-headed toms and an 18-20 inch bass drum. Using toms with bottom heads matches them to the sound quality of the bass drum, creating a sense of continuity that would be otherwise lost.

One of the more intriguing side effects that the use or absence of toms has on the piece is cultural association. As in much of his music, Volans claims that there is little to no ethnic (African or otherwise) influence in the writing.¹¹ All instruments are completely

⁸ Lan, Kai-Po. "Asanga, by Kevin Volans. Performed by Kai-Po Lan." *YouTube*. N.p., 02 Dec. 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

⁹ Fuhrman, Andrew. "Asanga - Kevin Volans, Performed by Andrew Fuhrman." *YouTube*. N.p., 19 Apr. 2009. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

¹⁰ Saetre, Sindre. "Asanga - Kevin Volans, Performed by Sindre Saetre." *YouTube*. N.p., 25 Sept. 2012. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

¹¹ Deppe, Liesel Margrit. *South African Music in Transition: A Flutist's Perspective*. Thesis. University of Toronto, 2012. Toronto: U of Toronto, 2012. *Tspace*. Web. 22 Nov. 2015.

decontextualized and work together to form a completely new sound. However, when players choose to use drums other than what is specified, like replacing the toms with additional skinned drums, cultural context is brought back into the picture. For example, Andrew Fuhrman's recording uses only congas and bongos, and as such a connection is made to the cultures that use those drums.¹² By retaining the toms requested in the score, cultural associations can be avoided entirely, which serves the theme of freedom from attachment.

When decisions have been made regarding the skinned drums, toms, and bass drum, the final choice to be made in terms of instrumentation is in regard to the high drums/metal sounds. Compositionally, these implements are clearly important, as they only show up three times: twice at dynamic climaxes, and in the final section of the piece as the texture thins out. They are also accompanied by directions in the score drawing attention to their addition, marking them as a contrasting voice to the relatively flat texture of the rest of the set-up. Because of this, it seems that using bongos or other high tension drums would do the music a disservice: if the player chooses to match the high instruments to the lower ones, the contrast that seems so important to these sections disappears into a more of the same texture. By choosing a metallic implement the contrast is preserved, but the question remains: what instruments are suitable? Percussionist Jonny Axelsson has performed and recorded the piece using a toy cymbal and a steel pipe, so an argument can be made in favor of found objects.¹³ However, this introduces the issue of beating spots, as each object is going to react differently, and some may require the player to contort their

¹² Fuhrman, Andrew. "Asanga - Kevin Volans, Performed by Andrew Fuhrman." *YouTube*. N.p., 19 Apr. 2009. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

¹³ Volans, Kevin. *Jonny Axelsson Plays Volans and Sharman*. Jonny Axellson. Jonny Axelsson, 2008. CD.

body into an uncomfortable position in order to get the correct sound. Percussionist Jaouen Rudolf performs the piece using small opera gongs, but these instruments have a complex harmonic structure and long sustain that makes the rhythm and accent pattern of the louder passages unclear.¹⁴ My preferred instrument selection to solve this problem is a set of two brake drums. While beating spots are still a significant issue due to the holes in the middle of each instrument, the sound is resonant enough to provide a contrast to the shortness of the drums, but articulate enough to preserve the rhythm of the passage.

After instrument selection has been decided, the next issue to be tackled should be the set-up. While this may seem to be a minor detail to non-percussionists, the setup of any multiple percussion pieces can be a deciding factor in the piece's success. If any one instrument is set up un-ergonomically, the player is likely to make unnecessary mistakes in performance. This is especially true of pieces like *Asanga*, where due to the wide range of instruments that can be used (Latin hand drums, toms from drum kits, concert bass drums, etc.) there is no method of assembly that immediately presents itself. Creativity in set-up is just as important as creativity in interpretation, and the two are, in fact, closely related.

When building my set-up for the piece, it was immediately clear that I needed to move the toms to the low register of the set-up. While this was a decision that went against what the score asks, the benefits are great enough to justify the change. First, placing the toms between the bass drum and congas makes timbral sense, as it allows the toms to act as extensions of the bass drum. Since these three instruments are all double headed, their sounds blend together and give the set-up a sense of connectivity.

¹⁴ Rudolf, Jaouen. "Asanga - Kevin Volans, Performed by Jaouen Rudolf." *YouTube*. N.p., 10 Feb. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.



Figure IV: My Set-Up (See Appendix A for additional photographs)

However, if the toms are placed between the skinned drums and the high instruments as is requested in the score, all connectivity of sound is lost. A specific example of the clarity gained by moving the toms occurs in m. 124-126. In this passage, only the high metals/high skinned drums and three highest drums are used.¹⁵ If the toms are left in the high register, this section will include one conga, two toms, and the high metals/high skinned drums. By altering the order of the drums, the only drums used in this section become congas, which helps clear up the voicing. Second, it removes the need for a bulky tom stand in front of the high metals/skinned drums. Since moving the toms downward requires lower drums, I was

¹⁵ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

able to use a floor tom with its own support system, and mount the remaining tom on a snare drum stand. Now instead of having the high metals/skinned drums separated from the rest of the set-up by a large mounting attachment, all instruments are flush against each other, allowing easier movement around the set-up.

The next issue regarding the set-up was drum height. As previously stated, manufactured stands do not always function correctly in multiple percussion pieces, as oftentimes drums are called upon to perform different functions than they were meant to. A perfect example of this is the conga. While these drums are usually played with the hands, and as such are mounted fairly high, *Asanga* calls for them to be played with sticks or mallets, which requires a much lower placement. Seeing as I only had access to one conga stand that could be set low enough, I started to experiment with nonstandard mounting systems. The first solution that I tried was to use the one traditional stand, and mount the other two drums on a thin piece of wood stacked on top of two tin cans. While this did work, it set the drums uncomfortably high and caused issues with note accuracy. Furthermore, the height of the congas and toms forced me to stack the bass drum stand on top of another board supported by cans, further complicating the rig. Because of these issues, this particular system was abandoned. By mounting a new larger board on top of four small wooden blocks, I was able to place all three congas together and bring the height of the setup down to where it could be played much more easily. This also eliminated the need to stack the bass drum stand, which significantly reduced the time it would take to break down and move the set-up.

According to Volans, *Asanga* is a piece “without conscious techniques”.¹⁶ This fits in with the theme of freedom from attachment, but upon learning the piece, it becomes clear that there is in fact a process taking place as the piece progresses.

At a first glance, *Asanga* appears to contain six distinct motivic ideas. Some of them are vital to the piece and last for long periods of time, while others come and go in seconds and act more like transitions than actual sections. These six ideas can be identified by their distinct textures, as are laid out in the following table:

¹⁶ Volans, Kevin. "Asanga - Kevin Volans." *Music Sales Classical*. N.p.n.d. Web. 15 Apr. 2016.







Motive	Measures	Description	Example
A	1-32, 36-41, 78-84, 131-136, 166-205	Sparse texture, frequent meter changes, use of dotted rhythms to offset the established groove	
B	33-35, 42-45, 59-66, 85-123, 127-130	Constant sixteenth note motion, shifting accent patterns, droning aesthetic	
C	46-50, 151-160	Constant even notes leading away from low drums	
D	51-58, 145-150	Quick upward passages moving away from accented low drums which are offset by eighth notes	
E	73-77, 137-144	Quick upward passages moving away from accented low drums which are not offset by eight notes	
F	124-126, 161-165	Dynamic climax, fast triplet figures involving the high metals/skinned drums for the first time	

Table 1: Occurrence and description of each recurring motive in Asanga

The work begins with an extended iteration of motive A, and employs a steady groove that is frequently interrupted by one of two outside forces. The first is a quintuplet figure played on the bass drum, which happens underneath main line to give a sense of

unease. The second is the use of a recurring 7/16 bar, which offsets the established rhythm by a sixteenth note. This bar, shown below, appears in both the opening and closing appearances of motive A, bookending the piece with familiar material.

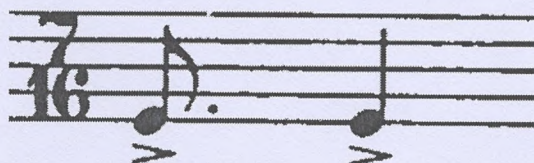


Figure V: 7/16 motive that disrupts the groove in both large 1 sections

This first A section is interrupted at measure 33 by the first iteration of the B motive, establishing the first consistent time signature of the piece.¹⁷

The B motive is one of the simplest ideas in *Asanga*: a constant stream of sixteenth notes with changes in the accent pattern. The result is a drone-like texture that, to an uninformed listener, sounds like a barrage of almost random notes. However, upon close inspection it becomes clear that there are actually only 12 unique measures that get recycled and reordered. Each iteration of this motive begins exactly the same, and each subsequent appearance adds material onto the end.

The next three motives, C D and E, are all related in their interpretation. C is made up of evenly spaced notes accompanied by grace notes and moving upward, D is characterized by an accented bass note followed by upward motion, and E is similar with the exception that the accented bass note is a connected part of the line. Each one of these motives is a different version of the same idea, with upward motion following an accent in the lower register. This is not always obvious: while the D and E motives clearly mark that

¹⁷ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

the low notes should be accented, the C motive has no dynamic marking whatsoever. It is left to the performer to find the pattern and interpret the music accordingly.¹⁸

Another relationship between these sections is the spacing between each low note. In the first iterations of the D and E motives in m. 51 and m. 73 respectively, most of the upward phrases are five eighth notes long. The C section is once again unique in this aspect, as each phrase differs in length, moving upward from four beats to seven beats in increments of one (it should be noted that this pattern disintegrates once the phrase length reaches seven). In this respect, the B motive is also related. Accents frequently fall on either the bass or second lowest drum, and the length of time between these accents varies between three and seven beats. Finding this relationship drastically changed my interpretation of *Asanga*: by phrasing to low notes instead of relying on bar lines, the B and C motives become much more clearly related to the D and E motives.¹⁵

Possibly the most unique idea in *Asanga* is the F motive. It is both the loudest and most rhythmically dense part of the piece, and introduces the two high metals/high skinned drums for the first time. Despite its clear compositional importance, the motive only appears twice and lasts between three and five measures.

As can be clearly observed in the motives table, several of these sections come and go quickly and without warning, making them somewhat unhelpful in making sense of the piece. If each appearance of a new motive is treated as a new section, there is no apparent pattern, and it would be easy to come to the conclusion that there really is no structure. However, if one groups these ideas together into sections, a larger plan begins to reveal itself.¹⁶

¹⁸ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

What is left after these groupings have been created is a kind of modified palindrome (line graph analysis available in Appendix 2). Working from the outside inward, the piece begins and concludes with two iterations of the A motive at m. 1-45 and m. 166-205 respectively. While these large sections (we will call them the 1 sections) are not nearly identical, and in fact share very little actual thematic material, the sparseness of the notes in comparison to the rest of the piece and the appearance of two rhythmic ideas (specifically the decrescendoing quintuplet and the 7/16 bar) make these two sections sound similar. One oddity of the first iteration of the large 1 section is that it concludes with five bars of 32nd note material that is largely unrelated to any of the established motives. Due to the brevity of this interjection, however, it is easy to call these measures transitional, foreshadowing the larger B motive that appears later.¹⁹

The next set of large sections (called the 2 sections) working inward occur at m. 46-84 and m. 131-165 and include large pieces from motives C, D, and E, with small interjections of motives A, B, and F. Structurally, this is the point where the palindrome becomes apparent. In the first iteration of this large section, the order of motives is C, D, E, with A appearing twice as a transition before E and the next large section. When we arrive at the second appearance of this section at m. 131, however, the motives appear starting with E and working backwards to C, and conclude with the second appearance of F. This is an inversion of the order of motives. Furthermore, this section expands upon the motives, lengthening each one with the exception of D, which is significantly shorter. F is

¹⁹ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

also expanded upon, adding two additional bars and slightly altering the first measure of the phrase.²⁰

The large 3 section of *Asanga* begins at m. 85 and is for the most part a long iteration of the B motive. As was previously established, this motive is created by reordering only twelve measures of music to make up sixty-six measures in the piece. To accomplish this, Volans reuses the previous appearance of the motive (which took place at m. 59) as the beginning of the larger section. From there new material is interspersed with repeated material, and only two bars, m. 105-106, are used only once. It is also noteworthy that one collection of measures, identified below as 3-3-2, appears three times in the large 3 section. While this is not fundamental to the section's structure, this recurring idea can be utilized to divide it into smaller parts for the sake of interpretation in a section that would otherwise be somewhat flat with regard to texture.¹⁷



Figure VI: 3-3-2 ordering that concludes three of the four parts of the large 3 section

²⁰ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

By assigning each measure of the B motive a number in the order of its appearance and dividing them into smaller parts using the recurrence of 3-3-2, one can divide the large 2 section into four parts of relatively similar length.

m. 85-92
1-2-3-1-2-3-3-2
m. 93-99
4-5-6-7-3-3-2
m. 100-114
4-5-6-8-9-10-11-5-6-8-9-7-3-3-2
m. 115-130
4-5-6-8-9-5-6-5-6-F Motive-12-12-1-1

Table 2: The order of measures in the large 2 section, split into four major parts

This process continues until measure 124, when motive F appears for the first time. This can be viewed as the climax of the piece, as it takes place approximately at the halfway point and is the most rhythmically dense and dynamically drastic phrase. The 3 section concludes with the introduction of one final measure and a return to the first measure, which once again calls attention to the palindromic nature of the piece.²¹

Despite the obvious evidence that *Asanga* is a palindrome, there are problems with this analysis, the most prevalent of which are the interjections of unrelated material. For example, there is an occurrence of the A motive in the first large 2 section at m. 67-72. This interrupts the palindrome, but it is such a fleeting interjection that it can be analyzed as transitional, as it leads into the E motive and the first quiet section of the piece. Another issue appears in both the large 1 and 2 sections at m. 33-34 and m. 59-67. Both of these

²¹ Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

interjections are material from the B motive, and they do not fit in with the palindromic analysis of the piece. However, in relation to the third B motive (which makes up much of the large C section), these two interjections appear to be pointing forward to this point. The first two measures of the second interjection are identical to the first interjection, and the first eight measures of the large 3 section are identical to the second interjection (with the exception of some modified accent patterns). While the two interjections of the B motive do not serve the palindromic form, they do lead towards the high point of the piece and as such serve a function of their own.²²

Now that a functional understanding of the *Asanga* has been achieved, informed choices of interpretation, mallet selection, and pacing can be made. Mallet choice is largely dependent upon the drums that the player chooses and varies widely between interpretations. Jonny Axelsson recorded the piece using the back ends of thin drum kit sticks to bring out the articulation of his small toms.²³ On the other hand, Sindre Saetre uses a setup of all congas plus junk metal, and uses wooden shafts wrapped in felt.²⁴ The most common implement used among percussionists playing on both skinned drums and toms is a natural rubber mallet. This is my personal preference, as it allows for both a clear articulation and a deep response from all of the drums.

While interpretation is highly personal, there are a select few issues that stand out as problems when learning *Asanga*, the first of which being tempo. During all iterations of the D and E motives, the tempo is marked 160 beats per minute to the quarter note. While

²² Volans, Kevin. *Asanga*. London: Chester Music (A Division of Music Sales Limited), 1997. Print.

²³ Volans, Kevin. *Jonny Axelsson Plays Volans and Sharman*. Jonny Axellson. Jonny Axelsson, 2008. CD.

²⁴ Saetre, Sindre. "Asanga - Kevin Volans, Performed by Sindre Saetre." *YouTube*. N.p., 25 Sept. 2012. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

it is absolutely possible to play these passages exactly at tempo, it is easy for the line to get lost because of the density of notes. In my own experience learning the piece, I found that it helped clarity to bring the tempo down to approximately 150 beats per minute to the quarter note.

The second large problem is found in the first appearance of the E motive at m. 73-77. This is the only piano dynamic that appears in all of *Asanga* (the rest of the piece is either forte or above with the exception of the quintuplet figure that ends the piece), and as such should be exaggerated as much as possible.



Figure VII: The first iteration of the E motive, also the first piano dynamic of the piece

While it is possible to play the section with whatever implements are chosen for the rest of the piece, a timbral change helps to single out the section as contrasting. My personal solution is to play the section with fingertips. This is beneficial in two ways: first, it makes the mallet change much easier logistically, as it only requires one pair of sticks to be dealt with. Second, it causes a much more extreme dynamic shift than any mallet could, drawing more attention to the contrast.

After an in depth analysis of instrument choice, form, and motivic material, it is clear that Volans' statement that *Asanga* has no conscious structure is not entirely true. By analyzing the palindrome that frames the piece and understanding the consequences of the

form, it is possible not only to give a satisfactory performance of *Asanga*, but also to find meaning in a work that has effectively hidden its purpose.

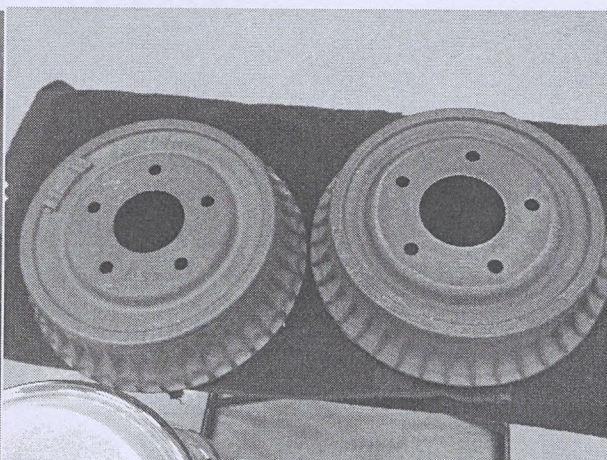
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PURE COTTON

Appendix A – Set Up

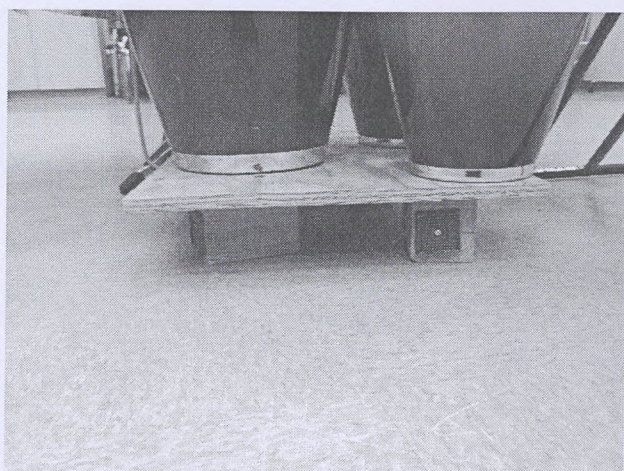
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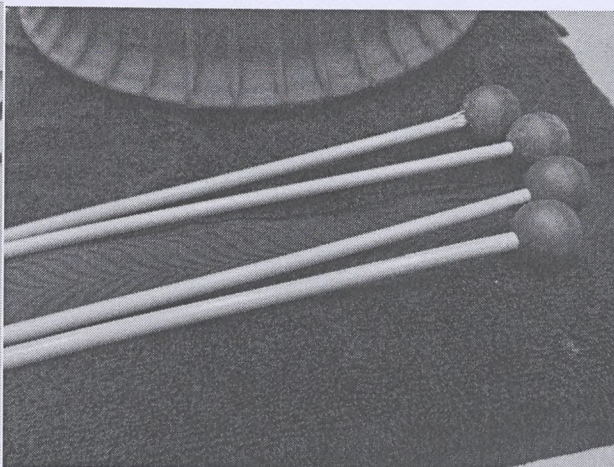
Total Set Up



Brake Drums



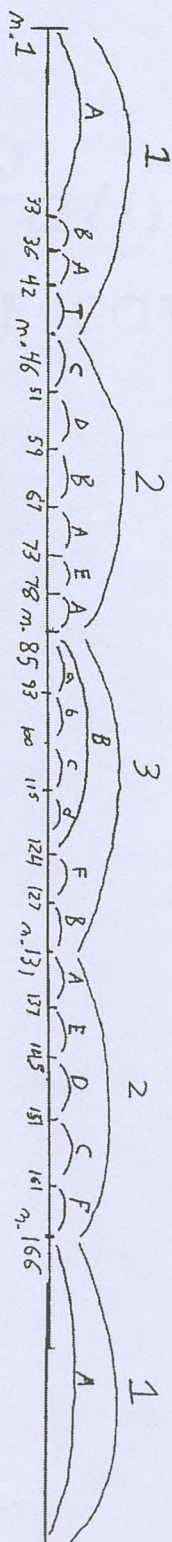
Wooden Block Support System



Mallets

Appendix B - Analytical Line Graph

T: Transition



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