

Steve Reich: Mallet Quartet (2009)

Mallet Quartet (2009) is scored for two vibraphones and two five octave marimbas. I had never written for five octave marimbas extending down to cello C. On the one hand I was delighted to have the possibility of a low bass and on the other hand apprehensive since just slightly too hard a mallet that low can produce noise instead of pitch. Eventually, after a bit of experimentation, this was well worked out.

The piece is in three movements, fast, slow, fast. In the two outer fast movements the marimbas set the harmonic background which remains rather static compared to recent pieces of mine like Double Sextet (2007). The marimbas interlock in canon, also a procedure I have used in many other works. The vibes present the melodic material first solo and then in canon. However, in the central slow movement the texture changes into a thinner more transparent one with very spare use of notes, particularly in the marimbas. I was originally concerned this movement might just be 'too thin', but I think it ends up being the most striking, and certainly the least expected, of the piece.

Mallet Quartet is about 15 minutes in duration. It was co-commissioned by the Palace of Arts, Budapest for Amadinda Percussion Group, by Nexus in Toronto, So Percussion in New York and Synergy Percussion in Australia. The world Premiere was given by the Amadinda Percussion Group in Béla Bartók National Concert Hall on December 6, 2009. The American Premiere was given by So Percussion at Stanford University Lively Arts in California on January 9, 2010.

Mallet Quartet is dedicated to the Amadinda Percussion Group on the occasion of their 25th anniversary and to Nexus for a lifetime of playing together with them.

Steve Reich