

From Andy Akiho's
Seven Pillars (2021)
 For four percussionists



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Andy Akiho began penning the music that would become *Seven Pillars*, his monumental work for percussion quartet, way back in 2013. The composer, now 42, had been commissioned to write a single movement work for Time Travelers, a percussion quartet founded by his close friend and frequent collaborator Ian Rosenbaum. But almost immediately, Akiho had plans for something much grander.

"As I was writing that piece, I had the idea for this entire 11-movement work—the structure, everything," Akiho said by phone this May. The concept was so enthralling that he all but committed to completing it, naming the commission *Pillar IV* to set it in the context of the unfinished work's larger structure. "I knew it would be a palindrome structure," he recalled, "based on *Pillar IV* being right in the center."

Ambition has never been in short supply for Akiho, who is known for his unwavering devotion to his craft. Born and raised in South Carolina, his path to composition was nontraditional: after excelling in his high school drumline, he found—and fell in love with—the steel pan while attending the University of South Carolina. He then spent much of his 20s in Trinidad, playing alongside masters of the instrument, before enrolling at Manhattan School of Music to study percussion performance. He began composing in his late 20s, encouraged by the composer Julia Wolfe, whose children he sometimes taught in exchange for composition lessons. He then went on to Yale for his master's.

Seven Pillars is, to date, the most complete realization of Akiho's recurrent compositional interests: intricate rhythmic counterpoint; layered, revolving symmetries; and a flare for the visual drama and athleticism of percussion performance. He and his collaborators in Sandbox Percussion—Rosenbaum, Johnny Allen, Terry Sweeney, and Victor Caccese—were afforded an extra year to work on the piece after the

Covid-19 shutdowns delayed the premiere.

"I'd set up the iPhone [camera] and just play for hours and hours," Akiho said. He'd then review the footage and transcribe his improvisations, often handing the material directly to the musicians—or teaching it to them by rote. If there was a sense among the group that a different instrument might be more effective, they'd make the switch. If someone had a tweak to a rhythm, they'd work it out together. "It was an insane luxury, the time we had to work on this. It really made it special."

The elaborate structural logic of the work—a large-scale palindrome radiating out from *Pillar IV*; internal palindromes in the pitches and rhythms of the individual movements; and a simultaneous additive process by which instruments are introduced in each movement—can be dizzying to comprehend. But deciphering the work isn't really the point, says Akiho. "I don't care whether anyone knows or not," he explains. "The way the palindrome structure works on a macro level helps tell the narrative, even though it's abstract."

Printed on the following pages are measures 48-97 of *Pillar III*. At the start of the excerpt, one of the four percussionists sets up a groove on a combination of metal pipes, bass drum, a glass bottle, and a table. "It's written idiomatically as if you were playing a drum set," Akiho says. Percussionists two and three then enter playing on either side of the same vibraphone, using an unorthodox technique in which the instrument is manually dampened almost immediately after the note is struck. Meanwhile, the remaining percussionist reintroduces a melodic lick that snakes in and out of each of the seven "Pillars."

Seven Pillars was premiered on December 3, 2021 at Emerald City Music in Seattle, WA. The work was initially released as a digital album, with corresponding short films for each movement. It has since been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and two Grammy Awards.

D

to Brass Mallets →

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

mf

48

49

50

[(x) = Light Non-Accents (ghosted) Glass Bottle, Table or sim.]

LV. →

LV. →

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

51

52

53

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

54

55

56

57

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

58 59 60

Sustained

pp *f*

pp *f*

Stacc. Brass Mallets (Subito Mute) →

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

61 62

mf (mute)

to Timbale Stick →

mf

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

63 64

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

65 66 67

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

68 69 70

E

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

mf

71 72

Stacc. Timbale Stick (Subito Mute) →
Strike Edge of Bar at 45° Angle with Stick Shaft

ff Stacc. Timbale Stick (Subito Mute) →
Edge (cont.) Edge of Bar at 45° Angle with Stick Shaft

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

73 74

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

75 76 77

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

78 79

F

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

80 81

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

82 83

Dampened (Dead Strokes)

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

Dampened (Dead Strokes or Foot Pedal to Mute)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

84 85

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

86

87

Stacc. (Subito Mute) - - - - -

G Normale
L.V. →

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

f

* Rec. (L.V. sempre until Reh. L) →

(1) (■ = Strike Rubber Band on Pitch F3 with Stick) - - - - - (2)

R l r r l l R l r r L r l sim. →

f

L.V. →

f

88

89

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

(3) (4) (5) (6)

90

91

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

sim. (normale)

ff

Dampened (Dead Strokes)

ff

(7) (8) (1) (2)

92 93

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

(3) (4) (5) (6)

94 95

PERC.1
Crotales
Gran Cassa

PERC.2
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.3
Vibraphone
(Shared)

PERC.4
Metal Pipes

P4 Batterie

to Drumsticks or Timbale Sticks →

to Drumsticks or Timbale Sticks →

(7) (8) (9)

96 97