

DIVERSION for Violin and Timpani by David Avshalomov
Program note

In my early school years I sang and studied piano, music theory, and percussion. My first performance in an orchestra was playing third glockenspiel in Orff's *Carmina Burana*, a percussion feast. What fun! Soon I discovered the glory of the kettledrums and set out to master them. I was hooked.

Naturally, I felt that percussion instruments had been largely neglected by the greatest composers. (This is not an uncommon feeling among champions of peripheral instruments; I know some "evangelistic" solo string bassists and saxophonists, for example.) Drummers' composer heroes included the likes of Mexico's Carlos Chavez, France's Darius Milhaud and Edgard Varese, the American William Kraft and the Canadian Michael Colgrass, two "drummers who made good." When I began to compose my own music (as a self-taught teen), I started with choral settings, but I also conceived the ambition to write a convincing concerto for timpani. I eventually wrote one, in Baroque style, as well as two pieces for pitched chromatic percussion quartet.

In college, in my spare hours I played timpani around the campus and community, sang in the chapel choir, and read madrigals with friends. I entered the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra's concerto competition and soloed with them in the Milhaud concerto. I wrote my honors thesis on the melodic use of kettledrums and, to underscore its point, composed a piece featuring them, to conclude my self-produced senior recital: the brief *Diversion* (1966) for timpani and violin (originally titled *Terwilliger*). Its bouncing, rhythmic opening motif came to me suddenly (as themes often do) while standing near my father's composing piano at home in Portland one evening at Winter break. The work unfolded directly from it, simple, tonal, full of repeating polymeters, but appealing. The form is ABA, with a lyrical middle in which the drums also get a turn at the melody. I dedicated it to my young violinist brother, Dan, who switched to viola before we ever played it together. (No reflection implied, as his 1996 recording of my *Torn Curtain* suite shows.)

My recital was a banging success; Christine Anderson, a violinist from our orchestra, helped give a virtuosic performance of my piece. The work then lay dormant for several years, until master percussion teacher George Gaber put it in front of students at Indiana U. It has since had many performances in the US as a recital piece, particularly since John Tafoya, then timpanist of the National Symphony, posted it on his web page. A young timpanist in Lyon played it at the local opera house's chamber music series in 2011 and even added a cadenza of his own making! It has become my most-played work—apparently it filled a real need.