

Seven Shells

Wally Gunn



Seven Shells

Solo prepared drum kit with speaking voice

Commissioned by Becca Doughty and consortium

Dedicated to Chief Norris Howard and the Pocomoke Indian Nation, MD, USA

Wally Gunn . New York, NY, and Salisbury, MD, USA . October 2016

Consortium

Colin Dees

Abby Fisher

Christopher Gunnell

Oliver Molina

Felix Miguel Reyes

Ian Rosenbaum

Nicholas Samuel

Paul Stevens

Thanks to

Becca Doughty

Consortium members

Chief Norris Howard, Pocomoke Indian Nation

Delmarva Discovery Center & Museum, Pocomoke City, MD

Cheryl Doughty and Sam Doughty

Eric Shuster

Ian Rosenbaum

Terrence Hunt

The New York Public Library

Laura Redish, Director, and Orrin Lewis, Tribal Coordinator,

Native Languages of the Americas website

Delaware Tribe of Indians

The Lenape Talking Dictionary

Evolution Publishing

Keith Cunningham

Morning Star (June Robbins), Nanticoke Indian Museum

Chief Natosha Norwood Carmine, The Nanticoke Indian Tribe of Delaware

Brett Jackson, Tribal Council Member, The Nanticoke Indian Tribe of Delaware

Cover photograph by Wally Gunn and Becca Doughty

Shells supplied by Cheryl Doughty

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This score current to 2017.10.14

This piece may be performed only by the commissioners until March 23, 2018.

wallygunn.com

wg@wallygunn.com

Program note

Early in 2016, Becca Doughty, a wonderful young percussionist, invited me to write a new piece for solo drum kit, for her and a consortium of other percussionists. She expressed a desire to include in it something that would make reference to her Native American heritage: Becca is a member of the Pocomoke Indian Nation of the Eastern Shore of Maryland. With Becca and her family's help, I began exploring Native American history and culture. From the stacks of books, and from room after room of museum exhibits, all created and curated by countless Native and non-Native American scholars and storytellers, a picture began to materialize of The People of the Eastern Woodlands and their life before European contact.

A significant event is related in many Eastern Woodlands stories. These stories describe the moment when, for the very first time, The People observe The White Man approaching them, on the sea in boats. The new presence elicits in The People a cautious curiosity, tinged with foreboding. This moment, or something like it, must have happened many times, to each group of Native Americans in turn. And these moments dramatically changed the lives of all Native Americans, eventually bringing about the demise of cultures and languages. With that in mind while writing the piece, I tried to reimagine this moment.

It is my sincere hope that this piece stands as a tribute to the Pocomoke Indian Nation of Southern Maryland, who, like many other Native American nations, lost ownership of their lands and lost command of their language, but continued to live on in the area, and determinedly preserve the knowledge and traditions of their ancestors.

– WG, 2016

Acknowledgements

The composer would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Pocomoke People who are the original custodians of the land in the Lower Counties of the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and about whom this piece is written; to pay respect to Elders past, present, and future of the Pocomoke Indian Nation; and to extend that respect to other Native American people who may encounter the piece. The composer also wishes to thank the commissioner, Becca Doughty, her grandfather Chief Norris Howard, and her family, who are members of the Pocomoke Indian Nation, for the opportunity to write this piece, for their continuing encouragement, and for the generosity with which they shared their knowledge throughout the project.

– WG, 2016

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Resources

Captain John Smith 400 Project

<http://www.johnsmith400.org/intro.htm>

Nanticoke Indian Tribe

<http://www.nanticokeindians.org>

Native Languages of the Americas

Native Languages of the Americas: Preserving and promoting American Indian languages

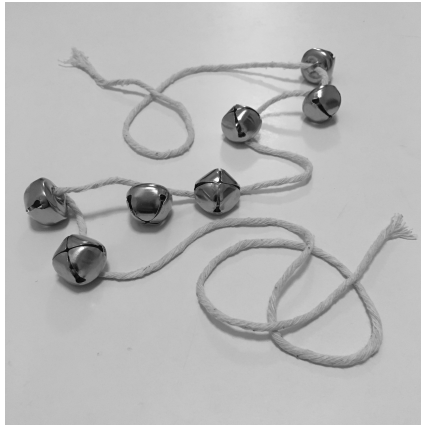
<http://www.native-languages.org>

Pocomoke Indian Nation

<http://www.pocomokeindiannation.org>

Performance notes: preparations

Snare and toms



2 x strings of 7 x 0.75 inch bells each: 1 draped loosely across snare (tie each end around a tension rod to keep it in place) and 1 tied around right ankle (or ankle of whichever leg usually plays kick drum pedal).

2 x 1.5 foot lengths of 1 inch link chrome, zinc-plated or brass-plated decorator chain / chandelier chain (the metal should be relatively thin gauge, light weight, and make a bold jingling sound, without dampening the resonance of the drums), looped, with ends tied together, draped across the skin of the high tom and the floor tom (tie ends around one tension rod to keep it in place, letting string sit on rim, but not letting chain sit on rim).

Kick drum



The kick drum is not played with the foot pedal, but with 2 handheld drum sticks. It should be positioned so the beaten skin is more horizontal than vertical. It may take some experimentation to get exactly the right height and the right angle for this to be possible. On some models of kick drum, the legs can be loosened, angled back, and extended, so that they raise the back edge of the drum well off the floor. A chock may be required for the front edge, to create an angle that suits the player.

Oyster shells

Find two oyster shells about 6 – 7 inches long from lip to hinge. Sit the first shell on a traps table within reach of your right hand (or whichever hand will be playing floor tom, ride cymbal etc.), with the concave inside of the shell facing up, like a bowl. The lip edge of the shell forms a rim. Hold the second shell in the right hand, inside facing up as well. For short notes, gently strike the held second shell upon the first, so the convex outer part of the held shell strikes the rim of the sitting shell. This should sound similar to striking together two pieces of thin slate, or a pair of claves. For long notes, gently scrape the held shell in a circular motion against the sitting shell, so the convex outer part of the held shell scrapes against the rim of the sitting shell, tracing its bumps and planes. This should make a light grinding sound, not unlike scraping a stone pestle around in a stone mortar.

Performance notes: voice

The voice should be miked by a mic on a boom stand, or a lavalier, or a combination of the two, and amplified through a sound system, so that the whispering can be heard, and the speaking is clearly audible over the full drum kit textures. The text should always be rendered without great range in pitch; it should be intimate and restrained, regardless of the written dynamic; it should avoid being impassioned, dramatic, or overwrought, but it can be resolute. Though the text is written rhythmically, try not to follow these rhythms slavishly lest the result be wooden and lifeless. The text rhythms are there as a guide, but the inherent, natural flow of the words and phrases should take precedence, with some just ahead of their designation and others just behind. Approach the text as a jazz singer might.

Performance notes: acknowledgment

Throughout Canada and Australia, prior to a public event or performance, it is considered respectful to acknowledge the local indigenous people. This is a protocol that is in common use, and performers of this piece in the United States are earnestly encouraged to adopt this protocol. The performer may make a short statement before the piece, after the piece, or in the printed program. A template text of acknowledgement is supplied below:

“I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Pocomoke People who are the original custodians of the land in the Lower Counties of the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and about whom this piece is written; to pay respect to Elders past, present, and future of the Pocomoke Indian Nation; and to extend that respect to other Native American people present.”

Seven Shells

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| come now | light a fire | one two three four |
| | warmer and drier | five six seven |
| to the water | we sit quietly | |
| wade in slip under | | flood tide rising |
| dive for oysters | soft sand | higher |
| | under blanket | keep swimming |
| skin stinging | | keep speaking singing |
| cold wet fingers | we feel hungry | |
| | good food full bellies | our tongues taste it |
| see now | then so sleepy | once sweet now salty |
| | | leaves us thirsty |
| autumn morning | no worries | |
| fog on the shoreline | till tomorrow | will this river |
| south sun shining | | run for ever? |
| | big day fishing | |
| we shiver | night drawing in but... | seven shells |
| soon it's winter | what is it? | |
| | | one |
| these riches | red sun setting | two |
| there now | on the sea I see | three |
| | something coming | four come on hurry |
| you collect them | | five |
| then give me seven | an island floating or flying? | six |
| shells to open | white cloud lying low? | |
| | a giant eel? | seven shells |
| I strike them | some strange creature? | |
| stones unlock them | a tree? | one two three four |
| | no... no... | five six seven |
| seven shells | | flood tide rising |
| | let's leave together | higher |
| ah yes | gather your treasures | one two three four |
| come on hurry | | five six seven |
| ah yes | seven shells | keep swimming |
| | | keep speaking singing |
| seven shells | ah yes one | |
| | two ah yes | |
| | three ah yes | |
| | four come on hurry | |
| | five ah yes | |
| | ah yes six | |
| | seven ah yes | |

Seven Shells

Drum Key

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Seven Shells". It consists of two staves: a single-line staff for the Voice and a five-line staff for the Drum Kit. The Voice staff begins with a double bar line and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains two notes: a quarter note labeled "whispered" and a quarter note labeled "spoken". The Drum Kit staff also begins with a double bar line and a key signature of one flat. It contains a series of percussion symbols: a quarter note labeled "ankle bells", a quarter note labeled "kick", a quarter note labeled "floor tom", a quarter note labeled "snare", a quarter note labeled "side stick", a quarter note labeled "high tom", a quarter note labeled "hi-hat", a quarter note labeled "cymbal", a quarter note labeled "oyster shells scraped", a quarter note labeled "oyster shells struck", and a quarter note labeled "rim of kick drum". The symbols for the hi-hat, cymbal, and oyster shells are represented by a cross, a triangle, and a circle, respectively. The symbols for the ankle bells, kick, floor tom, snare, side stick, high tom, and rim of kick drum are represented by a vertical line with a crossbar.

Voice

whispered

spoken

ankle bells

kick

floor tom

snare

side stick

high tom

hi-hat

cymbal

oyster shells scraped

oyster shells struck

rim of kick drum

Drum Kit

Seven Shells

Wally Gunn

A Free time

2

3

Voice

oyster shells (as long as feels right)

Drum Kit

mp

2/4

4 ♩ = 86

5

6

spoken
mp

7

come_ now

mp

2/4

8

9

10

to the wa - ter wade in slip un - der

3/4 2/4