

Songs for Snare Drum

Recollection

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Overview

In this paper, I shall explore the piece *Recollection*, from my compositional collection. The aim is to show the various techniques used for both its composition and performance, and to explore the various conceptual bases on which it is built.

Introduction

Recollection is a cyclical piece in the time signature of **9/8** that predominantly explores the theme of repetition. Within the Buddhist meditative tradition, one of the highest attainments one is said to achieve is the recollection of past lives. This idea gives the thematic elements to this piece, and also provides the basis on which some of its compositional elements are built.

Recollection comprises eight sections called cycles, each containing six bars with the exception of the second cycle, which contains five. Each cycle is closely linked rhythmically and structurally, with extensive use of reprise and motivic development. The piece gradually builds in intensity towards the eighth cycle, followed by a **D.C. al Fine** that takes us back to the beginning to start again. This marking represents the cyclical nature of rebirth and the thematic nature of the piece. In principle, the piece could be repeated indefinitely, continuously transitioning through each cycle.

Featuring a ternary meter, *Recollection* comprises three groups of six 16th notes per measure. The dotted quarter note tempo of 40 bpm allows for two things: firstly, it allow for the use of 64th note rolls that are just within the realms of technical plausibility; secondly, it allows for the use of dense rhythmic phrasing, including 32nd note tuplets and 64th note frisé. Anything faster than 40 bpm starts to make the 64th note rolls untenable, and muddies the denser rhythmic passages to a point where they lose articulation.

Recollection features the same three-part accompaniment as *Reflection*, *Contemplation*, and *Jhana*, namely a low-pitched bass drum, a mid-pitched drum like a taiko or conga, and a high-pitched woodblock. This allows for interplay between the contrasting voices that helps to simultaneously emphasise and disguise the underlying pulse.

Basic Structure

The sections of this piece, here called cycles, utilise essentially the same structure, with increasingly adventurous variations as the piece progresses. As stated above, the main thematic element of this piece is the use of repetition as a means to produce a cyclical piece of music, and the structure of each cycle helps achieving this effect.

First Cycle

9
8 8 8 8 12

3
8 8 10

5
8 12 3 3 3 3 2 4

fine

The six bars of the first cycle are shown above, with each phrase annotated in terms of the number of 16th notes it contains. Considered in this way, we can see the end of the cycle occurs at the *fine* in the fifth bar, with bar 6 comprising a transitional phrase to which we shall return presently. A repeating eight-note phrase comprises the main body of the cycle, with two 12s and a 10 interspersed to add displacement.

This initial cycle was produced entirely from the first phrase at the beginning of the first bar. Beginning with the accent, this phrase was repeated four times, with small variations added in each repetition, culminating in the pause following the first 12. The cycle restarts again in bar 3, this time repeating twice before a 10 displaces the pattern; it is once again concluded with a 12. The first half of the cycle, 8-8-8-8-12, is 44 16th notes in length, while the second half, 8-8-10-8-12, is 46. These two combine to form the 90-16th note cycle across the first five bars of this section.

Second Cycle

7
8 8 8 8 12

9
8 8

10
12 3 3 3 2 2 4

fine

If we now consider the second cycle, we see much the same in terms of both the structure and the phrases. The first part once again runs 8-8-8-8-12, again totalling 44 16th notes. The second part once again comprises the remaining 46 16th note of the five-bar cycle, with an alternate ending. Where, in the first cycle, the phrases resolved at the end of the fifth bar, a separate ending occupies

the sixth that runs 3-3-3-3-2-4 across the 18 16th notes of that measure. In the second cycle, that same ending has been shortened by a single 16th note, seen as the rest at the beginning of bar 11, and incorporated into the five-bar cycle of this section. Now, rather than the 46 notes of the second stage of the cycle running 8-8-10-8-12, they now run 8-8-12, representing a condensing of the original phrase.

First Cycle

1. 8-8-8-8-12
2. 8-8-10-8-12
3. 3-3-3-3-2-4

Second Cycle

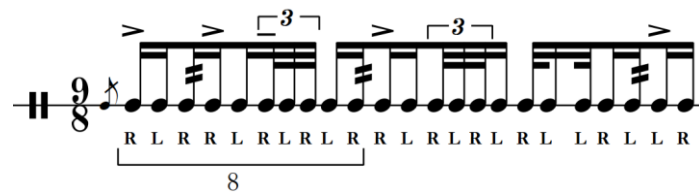
1. 8-8-8-8-12
2. 8-8-12
3. 3-3-3-2-2-4

We may consider these opening cycles, as well as the rest of the piece, under this analysis *ad nauseum*. The point on display here is that there are structural elements that bind these cycles together. Though they are rarely exact repetitions, it is clear, even from the above analysis of the opening sections, that each cycle is based on the same structural principles as the last.

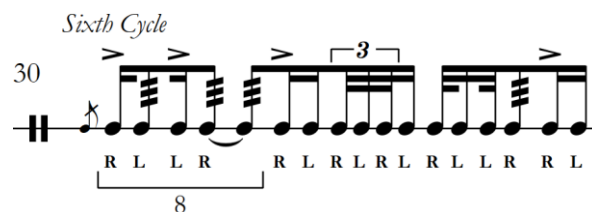
The phrases themselves in the second cycle are almost identical to those in the first, save for the fact that the 64th note double stroke rolls have been replaced with buzz rolls, a juxtaposition that is also explored throughout the remaining sections.

Vocabulary

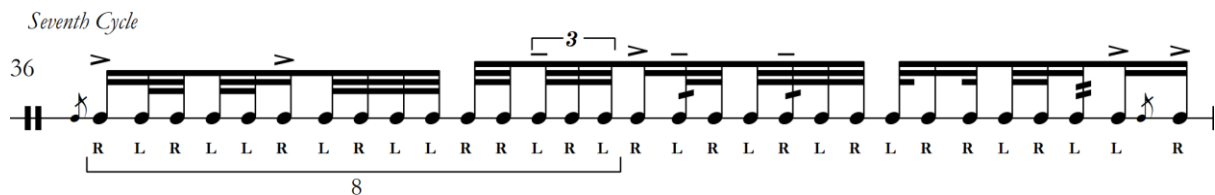
The opening bar contains the most important phrase in the piece, which is reprised and developed throughout the subsequent sections.



The bracketed phrase is eight 16th notes in length, and begins each of the first five cycles without deviation.



The first bar of the sixth cycle, shown above, features the same fundamental phrase, developed to include measured rolls to travel between the accents, which are retained in their original positions.



The same is true of the seventh cycle, which introduces new vocabulary, but retains the 8-16th note structure and the accent positions, as well as in the final cycle:

Final Cycle

42

L R L R R L R L L R R L L R R L R R L L R R L

8

The vocabularic make-up of the initial phrase is somewhat rudimental in nature, comprising as it does the typical 5-stroke roll, as well as a French frisé of 4. The phrase itself is borrowed and adapted from the piece *Ishvara*, from the first volume of this collection. Both phrases are shown below:

Recollection

R L R R L R L R L R R L R L R L L R L L R

8

Ishvara

1

R L R R L R R L L R L L R L L R L L R L R L L R

Though differences exist, the similarities between the two phrases are apparent enough to show the development of *Ishvara's* phrase into *Recollection*.

The adherence to the initial phrase means that the vocabulary and sticking throughout much of *Recollection* is remarkably consistent. The flam, 5-stroke roll, and 32nd note triplet constitute the main rudimental patterns for many of the phrases. Subtle variations of this, such as 9-stroke rolls, as well as the occasional drag and ruff, mean that the first six cycles are very similar in terms of the actual patterns played.

This changes in the seventh cycle, when the sticking concept becomes based on paradiddles and decorated single strokes.

Seventh Cycle

36

R L R L L R L R L L L R R L R L L R L R L R L R L R R L R L L R

8

37

L L R L R L L R L R R L R L R L R L R R L R L R L R L R

The first two bars of this cycle, shown above, demonstrate these elements as they are applied to the initial phrasing. The bracketed phrase at the beginning of bar 36 is an expansion of the original phrase shown above; it retains the original accent positions across the same eight 16th note span. This time, however, the vocabulary that plays between the accents has changed. Initially, unaccented 32nd note paradiddles are used, followed by single strokes decorated with strikethroughs. Throughout bar 37, *frisé de 4* in the way of 32nd note triplets are interspersed within

a syncopated single stroke figure, providing a driving and more intense configuration than any of the vocabulary used in the prior cycles.

This shift in intensity is emphasised as we transition into the eight and final cycle, in which the paradiddle and single stroke sticking concepts are fully embraced:

Final Cycle

42
L R L R R L R L L R R L L R R L R L R L R L L R R L L R R L L R R L

43
R R L R L R R L R L L R R L R L L R R L L R R L L R R L R L

44
R R L R L R L R L L R L R L R L R L R L R L L R L R L

45
L R L R R L L R R L R L R L R L R L R L R R L R L L

46
R R L R L L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

47
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

D.C. al fine

Above, the entire final cycle is shown, annotated with the phrase groupings. The accents provide the main rhythmic milestones, whilst 32nd note paradiddles and decorated single strokes provide the transition between them. From bar 46 to the end, sustained double strokes conclude the climax before the **D.C.** marking takes us back around to the beginning as the cycle starts again.

Recollection possesses the simplest vocabulary in terms of its use of rudiments and sticking concept. Despite the syncopated and unusual nature of the rhythms used, especially in the first six cycles, the sticking and rudimental figures remain largely uniform, such that performers familiar with the very first phrase will find little to trouble them throughout the rest of the piece.

Accompaniment

As with the other pieces in this collection, *Recollection* was written for a four-part ensemble, with the snare drum supported by a low-, mid-, and high-pitched voice, nominally scored as bass drum, taiko, and woodblock respectively.

The musical score is organized into three systems, each containing four staves for the Snare Drum, Marching Bass Drum, Taiko Drum, and Wood Block. The time signature is 9/8. The first system begins with a 'First Cycle' of rhythmic patterns. The Snare Drum staff includes limb patterns: R L R R L R L R L R R L R L R L R L L R L L R. The second system starts at measure 2 and features dynamic markings such as *mp*, *f*, and *p < f mp sub.*. The third system starts at measure 4 and continues the rhythmic motifs. The score uses various rhythmic notations, including eighth notes, dotted notes, and triplets, with accents and slurs indicating phrasing.

If we explore the first four bars, shown above, we see the accompanying parts fulfil various roles. The bass drum on the second staff begins by beating steady time, marking two dotted 8th notes per beat before synchronising with the snare drum at the end of the first measure. In the second, it returns to basic time keeping duties, before again synchronising with the snare drum's rhythm, especially at the end of the fourth bar, emphasising the main rhythmic idea. This alternation

between time keeping and synchronicity is idiomatic of the bass drum throughout the whole piece. It can act as a way to ground the beat, or it can emphasise the main rhythmic idea.

The taiko on the second line plays a much more adventurous opening phrase. Though not immediately obvious, the rhythms played by the taiko in the first two measures are based around the three 8th notes of each beat. These are syncopated by the use of 16th notes, and provide a steady pulse that is nevertheless rhythmically interesting, and provides a sense of movement beneath the more static bass drum.

The woodblock plays a sparser role in the opening passages, using its high-pitched tone to cut through without the need for complex rhythmic phrasing. That said, a more adventurous figure occurs once in the third and fourth measures that acts as an accent or feature, standing out against the lower registers of the other instruments.

The synchronised stop at the beginning of the third bar is theme developed through the rest of the piece. The combined phrasing of all four parts is dense and layered throughout *Recollection*, and the occasional synchronised stops followed by silence, such as in bars 5, 9, 26, and 41, provide a welcome respite and sense of cohesion.

Third Cycle

12

p *<f p sub.* *<f p sub.*

mp *f*

14

<f p sub. *f*

A particular idea utilised by the accompaniment parts is in the interplay between groups of two and groups of three 16th notes within the meter. In the four-bar passage above, we see this interplay between the bass drum on the second staff and the woodblock on the bottom. Each alternates with the other between playing 8th notes and dotted 8th notes, or 16th notes and dotted 16th notes. In bar 12, the bass drum plays 8th notes while the woodblock plays dotted 8th notes; at the beginning

of bar 13, the bass drum plays 16th notes while the woodblock plays dotted 16th notes. We may consider an 8th note to represent a group of two 16th notes, and a dotted 8th note to represent a group of three. Likewise, a 16th note represents a group of two 32nd notes, and a dotted 16th note a group of three.

It is common in ternary time signatures to explore the different ways that its subdivisions can be expressed. With six 16th notes within each beat, this can be expressed as two groups of three, dotted 8th notes, or as three groups of two, 8th notes. This common musical devices is apparent throughout the four bar-passage shown here, and defines much of the accompanying phrases throughout the rest of the piece.

Performance Considerations

When recording this piece for the first time, I utilised the same ensemble format as *Jhana*, *Reflection*, and *Contemplation*, with a bass drum, conga drum, and woodblock playing the accompanying parts. If available, a dry, slightly dampened taiko drum would work well in place of the conga due to the ambience evoked by this piece.

Considering the appearance of the notes on the score, this piece is not as technically difficult as one might expect. The slower tempo means that the dense rhythms are able to be well articulated, and allows for the use of 64th note rolls, as discussed. The primary challenges, therefore, relate to the reading of the rhythms, as with the half-time sections of *Jhana*, and the articulation of the rolled segments which, as 64th notes, are quite fast.

Fortunately, with regard to the former, the rhythmic phrasing, once established in the first cycle, remain largely consistent throughout the rest of the piece. This means that performers familiar with the rhythms of the first cycle will be largely set for what follows. It is important, when practising these rhythms, to keep track of the underlying subdivision, comprising three groups of six 16th notes per measure. To this end, a metronome may be used to express both the quarter note beat, and a chosen subdivision, such as 8th notes, dotted 8th notes, or the 16th notes themselves. Once the rhythms are heard against these subdivisions, they should make much more sense.

As with *Attainment*, many of the rhythmic variations plays with the idea of syncopation. Many accents occupy off-beat positions within the beat, with a lot of anticipation at the end of a beat, followed by a rest on the first note of the following beat. As with all musical practice, this syncopation is best practised against the underlying beat, allowing one to strengthen their inherent sense of timing, which in turn allows for the rhythmic phrases to be more confidently expressed.

In reference to the rolls, *Recollection* utilises two fundamental types: 64th note open double strokes, and closed buzz strokes. It is important that performers are familiar with the technique to perform each, as well as the difference between the two.

The image shows a musical staff in 9/8 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation consists of a sequence of notes with various rhythmic markings: accents (>), triplets (3), and slurs. Below the staff, three diagrams illustrate the sticking for 64th note rolls. The first diagram shows a 5-stroke roll: R R L L R. The second diagram shows a 4-stroke roll: R R L L. The third diagram shows a 3-stroke roll: L L R R. The rolls are positioned under the notes of the first bar of the staff.

Above, the first bar's figure has been annotated with the sticking used to perform the rolls. We can see the use of 64th note 5-stroke rolls within the space of the individual 16th note, with the fifth stroke of the roll on the subsequent 16th note. At the tempo of dotted quarter notes at 40 bpm, these 64th notes are fast, but not insurmountably so. 64th notes at a dotted quarter note tempo of

40bpm is the equivalent of 32nd notes at a quarter note tempo at 120 bpm, which is standard for rudimental pieces.

In contrast, the same phrase from the second cycle uses buzz rolls.

The image shows a musical staff in 9/8 time with a treble clef. The notation consists of a series of eighth notes with stems pointing up, grouped into three measures. The first measure contains six notes, the second six, and the third six. Above the staff, there are annotations: a '3' over a triplet of notes in the first measure, and another '3' over a triplet in the second measure. Below the staff, there are three diagrams illustrating the stickings for the buzz rolls. Each diagram shows two eighth notes beamed together, with a 'z' above them indicating a buzz roll. The stickings are: R L R, R L R, and L R L.

Above, we see the same phrase but with buzz rolls instead of open double strokes. The annotations beneath the staff show the exact stickings used to produce these buzz rolls. This time, instead of playing 64th notes as open double strokes, two individual 32nd notes are played as single strokes, with each individual stroke buzzed to produce the roll. Terminologically, both of these are referred to as 5-stroke rolls, but as can be seen here, the buzzed version utilises two buzzed 32nd notes, whilst the open version utilises four individually articulated 64th note strokes.

The final cycle likely represents the most technically demanding passage, comprising a steady stream of 32nd note paradiddles, interspersed with 32nd note triplets in the form of frisé of 4, 64th note double strokes, as well as individually diddled 64th notes within a single stroke roll. Similar passages exist in *Reflection*, such that that piece and this one can be practised together; practising *Recollection's* Final Cycle will benefit performers playing the later sections of *Reflection*, and vice versa.

When tackling passages such as these, there are two elements that must be developed in conjunction. The first is the requisite physical capacity to actually produce the strokes, and the second is the instantaneous recognition of the rhythmic phrase, such that the physical expression can happen without conscious thought. In essence, like reading words on a page, the performer learns to recognise large swathes of notes as words and sentences, and rather than reading the individual letters, produces the sound as a reflex. At the speeds involved with these figures, this is the only approach that will allow fluent performance.

To achieve this, both factors – the technical and the reading – are developed through familiarisation and internalisation, which are themselves a product of slow and frequent repetition. Working with small blocks and repeating them regularly, slowly, and with due attention to the clarity of strokes and the techniques used to perform them will, over time, yield the desired results. As with all things, patience and persistence are key.