Kevin Volans' She Who Sleeps Witha Small Blanket: An Examination of the Intentions, Reactions, Musical Influences, and Idiomatic Implications

Peter D. Breithaupt

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KEVIN VOLANS' *SHE WHO SLEEPS WITH A SMALL BLANKET*: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INTENTIONS, REACTIONS, MUSICAL INFLUENCES, AND IDIOMATIC IMPLICATIONS

by

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KEVIN VOLANS’ *SHE WHO SLEEPS WITH A SMALL BLANKET*: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INTENTIONS, REACTIONS, MUSICAL INFLUENCES, AND IDIOMATIC IMPLICATIONS

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Western Michigan University, 2011

Using and expanding upon a theoretical model for examining the meaning of music presented by ethnomusicologist Timothy Taylor, one of the leading scholars on composer Kevin Volans and his music, this research will attempt to properly position Volans’ percussion solo, *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, composed in 1985, within Volans’ African Paraphrase classification. It will also attempt to dissociate *She Who Sleeps* from the claims of hegemonic cultural appropriation that are attached to Volans’ African Paraphrase pieces. In his model, Taylor talks about the “inseparable metatext” that surrounds a piece of music and includes the composer’s intentions, the listener’s reactions, and the music itself. Expanding upon this model, this research will examine the percussion idiom and discuss whether there are qualities inherent in this idiom that influence claims of cultural appropriation. Based on *She Who Sleeps*’ compositional adherence to the intentions of “New Simplicity,” a musical movement that arose in Cologne, Germany in the late 1970s that Volans supported, and based on the dissociation of *She Who Sleeps* from claims of cultural appropriation given its compositional idiom, this research will ultimately showcase *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* as Kevin Volans’ quintessential African Paraphrase.
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Peter D. Breithaupt
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1985, Kevin Volans composed his percussion solo *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*. Among scholars and critics, the work is considered one of his African Paraphrase pieces. Volans’ African Paraphrase pieces were composed from the late 1970s until the early 1990s when Volans suddenly shifted his artistic aesthetics. “African Paraphrase” was a label first used by Volans that appeared on a portfolio of compositions submitted for a Doctor of Music degree at the University of Natal (now known as the University of KwaZulu-Natal). These African Paraphrase pieces began as emanations of, what is now called, the *Neue Einfachheit* or “New Simplicity,” a musical movement that arose in Germany in the late 1970s that was, as defined by composer and scholar Christopher Fox, “a reaction to the formalized, abstracted compositional procedures of postwar avant-garde music.” Believing in a type of uninhibited musical composition with no right or wrong ways of composing and believing that all sound is free to be used, “these composers refused to make style the arbiter of value,” musicologist Bob Gilmore writes in his article “Wild Air - the music of Kevin Volans.” Gilmore continues that “some musicologists today regard the New Simplicity as the beginnings of postmodernism in music.” Living in Cologne, Germany, Volans and several of his contemporaries, namely, Clarence Barlow, Walter Zimmerman, and Gerald Barry, were

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forerunners of this movement; this group of composers is now often referred to as the Cologne School.

Compared to the other Cologne School composers, Volans has received the most recognition for his work in this time period, garnering international acclaim for several of his African Paraphrase works, most notably his first two string quartets, *White Man Sleeps* and *Hunting: Gathering*, both of which were produced in collaboration with the Kronos Quartet. Pursuant to this international recognition, there has been substantial discourse regarding Volans and his African Paraphrases. While some of the discourse involves detailed analyses of these works, much of the commentary is criticism of Volans’ Paraphrase project, specifically, his utilization of African music within the realm of Western classical music. The compositional techniques that Volans employed in the Paraphrases, quotation and paraphrase, as well as the postmodern aesthetics of the New Simplicity movement inherent in these works have generated much discord. Many critics accuse Volans of cultural appropriation and inescapable European hegemony.

With this rather substantial amount of critical discourse regarding Volans and his African Paraphrase pieces, there is surprisingly very little discussion of *She Who Sleeps*. Scholars and critics tend to group *She Who Sleeps* with the other Paraphrases based on an assumption tied to its compositional date, its African-inspired title, and an outwardly unaware view of African drumming. Many listeners feel the piece resembles African drumming simply because they see and hear ‘drumming.’ In response to this categorization, Volans maintains that *She Who Sleeps* bears no relationship to African drumming or connection to African music. Contradictions surrounding the piece augment when accolades from the percussion world praise Volans for his use of African
aesthetics in the piece. The Percussive Arts Society considers *She Who Sleeps* "a landmark work."\(^4\) Given this host of contradictions, *She Who Sleeps* deserves serious consideration. Seemingly basic questions need to be addressed. Should *She Who Sleeps* even be considered one of the Paraphrases? Does the piece adhere to the ideals of the Cologne School's new music prescribed in the late 1970s? Furthermore, if *She Who Sleeps* can be considered a Paraphrase, are the critics' accusations of cultural appropriation applicable to the piece? Are there qualities inherent in the percussion idiom that impact this discussion of cultural appropriation? Also, are there any other factors causing Volans to dissociate *She Who Sleeps* from African influences?

To answer these questions, I will utilize and expand upon the "theoretical model for looking at music" presented by ethnomusicologist Timothy Taylor in his essay, "When We Think About Music and Politics: The Case of Kevin Volans."\(^5\) Timothy Taylor is one of the leading scholars on Volans and his music. I believe his model is applicable not only to the discussion of Volans, but also to any composer and any music. Taylor's model considers the composer's intentions, the listener's reactions, and the music itself to be a part of a "metatext, inseparable."\(^6\) Of his model, Taylor writes that "meanings are made not only by the composers, but by the pieces themselves, and in listener's reactions. All of these meanings rub elbows in this metatext, and all influence each other."\(^7\) Using this model, Taylor ultimately accuses Volans of cultural stealing or

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\(^5\) Timothy Taylor, "When We Think about Music and Politics: The Case of Kevin Volans," *Perspectives of New Music* 33, no. 1/2 (Winter-Summer 1995): 505.

\(^6\) Taylor, "When We Think," 510.

\(^7\) Taylor, "When We Think," 510.
the illegitimate use of various African musics in his African Paraphrase pieces. My utilization of this model will include: Volans’ intentions and utterances stemming from his early and current aesthetic standpoints; musical analysis of the piece; and reactions of the critics, performers, and listeners. My expansion of this model will include the intrinsic qualities of the percussion idiom and their implications for She Who Sleeps. My application of this expanded model to She Who Sleeps is an attempt to properly position She Who Sleeps within Volans’ African Paraphrase classification and to debunk the existing claims of cultural appropriation in regards to the piece. With this application, She Who Sleeps will communicate an unscathed message of the ideals that formed Volans’ prescription for new music in the 1970s and that were the impetus for his African Paraphrase pieces. Ultimately, She Who Sleeps will be considered Volans’ quintessential African Paraphrase.

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8 Taylor, “When We Think,” 510.
CHAPTER 2

THE AFRICAN PARAPHRASES: INTENTIONS AND REACTIONS

If *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* is to be considered one of Volans’ African Paraphrases, it is essential to examine the context surrounding the piece. Intrinsic to the African Paraphrase pieces is a set of fundamental artistic intentions designed by Volans to fulfill a prescription for new music. Over the past two decades, a list of contentious scholarship, mainly polemical, has arisen because of the artistic intentions used by Volans to compose the Paraphrases. Naturally, if *She Who Sleeps* is considered an African Paraphrase, it will embody these artistic intentions and also be susceptible to this written criticism. This chapter will explore Volans’ African Paraphrase intentions and the circumstances that led to their creation. It will also provide a survey of the most prominent commentary regarding scholars’ reactions to the Paraphrases, thus, supplying the basis for further discussion of how *She Who Sleeps* ultimately exemplifies African Paraphrase characteristics and surpasses the popular criticism.

Volans and the Cologne School’s Postmodernism

Born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa in 1949, Volans received a strictly European education. As a child, he was precocious showing great talent as both a pianist and a painter. Gilmore states that by the age of thirteen, Volans was creating quasi-Abstract Expressionist art in his parents’ garage, and by the age of twenty-one, he gave
his first broadcasted piano recital as an accomplished pianist.\(^9\) After graduating from the University of Witwatersrand where he focused on musicology and composition, and after completing one year of post-graduate study at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, Volans moved to Cologne, Germany in 1973 to study musical composition with Karlheinz Stockhausen at the Hochschule für Musik. From 1973 to 1976, Volans was part of Stockhausen’s talented class of composition students; Volans even became Stockhausen’s teaching assistant. Along with his studies with Stockhausen, Volans studied music theater with Mauricio Kagel, piano with Aloys Kontarsky, and electronic music with Johannes Fritsch.

In the late 1970s, Volans became disillusioned with Stockhausen’s uncompromising method of formula-based serialism. Gilmore writes that “Stockhausen’s students were not allowed to write tonal music; they weren’t even allowed to write octaves, because they created an unwanted emphasis on one pitch over another and thereby gave the impression of a tonal centre.”\(^{10}\) In an interview with Gilmore, Volans said that his “whole mission in the later 70s was about overcoming dogma and style—how to write music that was not restricted by the idea of what new music was supposed to sound like.”\(^{11}\) Fox in his essay, “Where the river bends: the Cologne School in retrospect,” quotes Volans as saying the root of the “musical crisis” that he and his Cologne School contemporaries faced was located in the institutionalization of modernist

practice.\textsuperscript{12} The goal of Volans and his fellow Cologne School composers became to overcome the prescriptive musical milieu of Stockhausen’s serialism, an institutionalized modernism, by working towards a new musical aesthetic. The Cologne School composers also aligned themselves against the aspects of minimalism that they believed were a “bland pursuit of predictability,” Fox quotes Volans.\textsuperscript{13} Accordingly, Fox writes that serialism and minimalism “dominated musical life” and the “prescription for a new music” advocated by Volans and the other Cologne composers was neither serialist nor minimalist.\textsuperscript{14}

In a letter written to Walter Zimmerman, in 1977, Volans formulated an ostensible manifesto for this new musical movement (now referred to as the New Simplicity movement):

New Music demanded listening without preconception. It challenged, as all important music has done throughout the history of western music, ideas of what is beautiful, what is acceptable as musical form, what constitutes a ‘musical’ event. The emancipation of all sound as legal musical tender, the abundance of forms, techniques and musical grammers demanded above all that the listener approach each work on its own terms and evaluate it within its own defined framework – in short, that the listener be free from dogmatism.\textsuperscript{15}

For Volans, this “New Music” was not tethered by compositional prescriptions nor by the aesthetics of sound. No manner of musical creation was proscribed: a direct repudiation of Stockhausen’s modernism. Through compositional liberty, Volans and his fellow


\textsuperscript{13} Fox, “Where the river bends,” 29.

\textsuperscript{14} Fox, “Where the river bends,” 29.

\textsuperscript{15} Fox, “Where the river bends,” 29.”
Cologne School composers hoped a more absolute means of expression would be generated and heard by the listeners. Volans concluded his letter to Zimmerman by advocating “a music that is a-historical and local...of here and now, a music that is personal...organic and vigorous.” The proclamations contained in this letter essentially became the Cologne School’s postmodernism. While establishing a clear, concise, and all-encompassing definition of postmodernism is difficult since the term has a broad range of meanings, Volans’ declaration highlights some of the most prominent and recognizable trends of what we now consider general postmodern sensibilities in music. In her introductory essay “Musical Modernism, Postmodernism and Others” to *Western Music and Its Others*, Georgina Bonn describes such postmodern trends: reaction to modernism’s “univocal hierarchies of musical value and authority” (these being, in Volans’ case, the strictures of Stockhausen, the postwar avant-garde) and a “unifying proposition” calling for the unification of all musical traditions, a “will to hybridity” (Volans’ call for the “emancipation of all sound”).

In these seemingly basic assertions lie sundry convoluted and contentious complexities that have given rise to all kinds of scholarship attempting to decipher the ‘political correctness’ of such postmodern trends: the environment in which Volans’ work has severely fallen victim to such discourse. However, interesting to note, Christopher Fox makes known that the term ‘politically correct’ “had yet to be invented

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when the Cologne School members began their [postmodern] work.”¹⁸ Volans and the Cologne School had only one intention: to create a new music that redefined musical language. For Volans, the implementation of the Cologne School prescription for new music led him to his home, South Africa, and to compose his African Paraphrase pieces. In these pieces, he sought a “reconciliation of African and European aesthetics, of the Western and African spirit” principally through the processes of musical quotation and paraphrase.¹⁹

The African Paraphrase Intentions

Volans’ first true exposure to the traditional musics of Africa was during his study of electronic music composition at the Hochschule für Musik from 1976 to 1979. During this time, he was commissioned by the West German Radio (WDR) to make field recordings of various types of African music. Volans made several trips back to South Africa recording natural sounds as well as music. From these recordings, Volans composed three taped pieces that are considered part of his African Paraphrase collection: Cover him with Grass, Kwazulu Summer Landscape, and Studies in Zulu History. “I just thought African music was fantastic. I thought it was better than the sort of thing I was working on—I thought it was better than Stockhausen,” Volans proclaimed to Timothy Taylor in a 1989 interview.²⁰ As Bob Gilmore describes, “Listening to his tapes in his apartment in Germany, he [Volans] found the perfect antidote to the restrictive


atmosphere of the Köln new music world.”

Gilmore continues to remark that this antidote involved integrating “[African music’s] essence—the way it unfolds in time, the relationship between the musicians in an ensemble, its open-ended quality.”

Taylor describes that through his study of African music, Volans saw an apparent “disregard for pattern and formal symmetry” in the African notion of musical form. In an interview with Gilmore, Volans, explaining his interest in African formal qualities, said:

That’s why I was interested in African music, because it was a kind of music that had no perception of form, no perception of time as we know it, no guilt about change, was free from guilt. In the 70s we had serial guilt, and then in the 80s it was guilt about change, an anxiety about change; the minute a piece of music started you felt it had to change. In African music that feeling doesn’t exist. I was interested in trying to write music that was in a sense formless.

For Volans, musical ‘formlessness’ was paramount to his renouncement of Stockhausen’s modernism. Volans’ interest in musical formlessness was also augmented by a fortuitous encounter (which led to a close friendship) with the American experimental composer Morton Feldman at the 1984 Darmstadt International Summer School. Feldman’s ideas paralleled those of Volans. Volans told Gilmore that “Feldman would say things like: ‘I’m not interested in timing, I’m interested in time’…my interest in African music was precisely that, that they had a totally different perception of time.”

Volans’ experience with African formal qualities as well as Feldman’s validation motivated his intention to

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23 Taylor, “When We Think,” 511.


pursue formlessness in music. This intention is pivotal to the construction of the African Paraphrases, and according to Gilmore, Volans’ ‘formless’ objective “continues to the present day” playing an integral role in his recent work.26

Integrating this African “essence” into his music also prompted Volans to write the Paraphrases strictly for Western instruments. In an interview with Taylor, Volans, describing this intention, said that his “major decision in these pieces was that I wasn’t going to introduce exotic instruments into Western...music....Rather, I wanted to approach it the other way around. I would take Western instruments and treat them as though I were an African composer.”27 Volans viewed this approach as an extension of the African tradition of borrowing instruments, such as Zulu guitarists taking the Western guitar, retuning it, and playing traditional music.

Perceiving himself as an “African composer,” Volans used literal quotations of African music and paraphrases comprised of original music in an attempt to emulate a certain African musical style in the African Paraphrases. However, as Volans said to Taylor, “I didn’t just want to quote African music, because I thought that had no point at all.”28 Instead, Volans wanted his use of African music to “honor...the extraordinary and beautiful compositional techniques employed by African traditional composers.”29 Thus, the primary objective for Volans was, as Taylor describes, to utilize “a procedure of borrowing that would retain the integrity of the borrowed materials as well as [his] music—in other words...present the two kinds of music alongside each other, rather than


29 Kevin Volans, e-mail message to author, November 24, 2010.
one superior or inferior,” i.e., a partnering of African music and Western music. Volans wanted to avoid making music that could be construed as hegemonic in any way. Volans’ Paraphrases essentially consist of a mixture, in varying degrees, of direct quotations and paraphrases that are played on Western instruments, working within a Western context (e.g., a string quartet, percussion solo, etc.), and that were put into motion by Volans’ Western-wrought integration of African formal aesthetics. It is with this crucible of African and European musical characteristics and aesthetics that Volans hoped to bring his artistic intentions to fruition and, ultimately, actualize the Cologne School’s prescription for new music. Volans’ artistic desire for African and Western musical and aesthetical reconciliation also carried an implicit social and “political agenda” at the time, as the pieces were composed during the Apartheid Era in South Africa. While Volans did not explicitly communicate a socio-political motivation for composing his Paraphrases, the political message of reconciliation can be considered an implicit, subsumed intention, and has played a large role in Volans’ subsequent consideration of the African Paraphrases as well as in the subsequent criticism of scholars.

The Criticism of Scholars

During the past two decades since Volans composed his last African Paraphrase in the early 1990s (arguably his fifth string quartet, *Dancers on a Plane*, published in 1993), significant musical scholarship has been devoted to Volans and his Paraphrase

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31 Volans, e-mail to author.
Despite the honorable intentions that fueled these works and several articles written by Volans explaining his project (see his articles “Paraphrase,” “Of White Africans and White Elephants,” “White Man Sleeps,” and “Dancing in the Dark”), much of the academic commentary concludes that Volans’ project was a political and aesthetic failure based upon his postmodern treatment of African material in his compositions, as musicologist and composer Martin Scherzinger proclaims in his essay “Whose White Man Sleeps: Aesthetics and Politics in the Early Works of Kevin Volans.”

Further examination of scholarly criticism includes an essay by Jürgen Bräuninger entitled, “Gumboots to the Rescue,” published in 1998, in which Bräuninger puts forth the most general and censorious claims against Volans, as well as, Taylor’s article, published in 1995, “When We Think About Music and Politics: The Case of Kevin Volans.” Also, worthy of examination is the exhortative, though unresolved, conclusion set forth by Martin Scherzinger in the just cited “Whose White Man Sleeps” that was published in 2008. The conclusion of musicologist Christopher Walton in his 2002/2003 review of The Duke Quartet’s recording of Volans’ String Quartets 1, 2, and 6 will also be briefly presented.

This survey of what I consider to be currently the most prominent critical commentary regarding Volans is not intended to set the precedent to absolve Volans, his

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32 For a complete listing of Volans’ work, see Appendix A.


postmodern ideals, and the majority of his African Paraphrases from negative criticism. Rather, I want to illustrate the contentious (and quite convoluted) context in which *She Who Sleeps* is immersed when it is assumed to be an African Paraphrase.

In his article “Gumboots to the Rescue,” Bräuninger, a South African professor who teaches composition at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (where Volans studied), accuses Volans of stealing African music and selling it as original composition. After his discussion of Volans’ *Mbira*, Bräuninger asks, “There is nothing wrong with fabricating orchestrations or arrangements of existing music, but is it legitimate to sell those as original compositions? Is this exploitation in a modern guise?”37 According to Bräuninger, Volans’ postmodern compositional technique of sequential pastiche (a technique that stems from Volans’ incorporation of African ideas of repetition and form) used in his African Paraphrases, i.e., String Quartet No. 2 *Hunting: Gathering*, strips the African musics of their complexities, idiosyncrasies, and functions. “Volans’s collages sound like strolls...from one super-market shelf to the next. Listening to them is like consuming the art music equivalent of MTV,” Bräuninger writes with contempt.38 Perhaps, as a fellow South African composer, Bräuninger is a bit jealous of Volans’ international success. Regardless, in the second half of his essay, Bräuninger discusses Reinhard Febel’s (another South African composer) fourth piece from his *Vier Stücke für Violine und Orchester* in which Febel utilizes a South African gumboot dance as the macro-formal structure. Bräuninger feels that this work exemplifies a desirable postmodern composition and believes that this piece serves as “one of many ways


forward” in regards to postmodernist composition and the cultural borrowing of African music. He writes that, “By first ‘reclaiming’ and then transforming and recontextualizing gumboot dance…Febel pre-empts possible accusations in relation to…‘ethical problems’…and…‘cultural banditry’.” These are accusations charged to Volans by Bräuninger.

Taylor’s “When We Think About Music and Politics” offers a very interesting and thoughtful discussion (not blatant condemnation) of Volans and cultural appropriation, but concludes by accusing Volans of this malfeasance. Taylor begins his essay by providing a succinct history of modern Western aesthetics and shines light on the fact that “Modern Western aesthetics is marked by a concern for art as an autonomous object more than anything else.” Taylor believes that in criticism of art, especially music, the myriad of a work’s implicit meanings are left out. Taylor writes, “This dominant view of music is not ‘wrong,’ only incomplete in its refusal to acknowledge meanings of politics, gender, class, race, and ideology for music.” To correct for this incompleteness, Taylor offers a brilliant “theoretical model for looking at music and its meaning,” and first applies this model to “elucidate meanings” about Volans’ music. Taylor’s model consists of what he considers an inseparable metatext of a composer’s intentions, listener’s reactions, and the music itself.

41 Taylor, “When We Think,” 507.
42 Taylor, “When We Think,” 508.
43 Taylor, “When We Think,” 510.
As previously mentioned, Taylor believes that Volans, in his African Paraphrase works, intended to reconcile African music and Western music, thus making a political statement against apartheid in South Africa. Taylor does, however, point to a change in Volans’ intention in the mid-1990s and refers to Volans’ aesthetic shift. Taylor quotes Volans as saying that he has come to realize that “although I come from Africa, my artistic roots are really Western. I think of all these pieces now as strictly Western pieces.” Taylor believes that “Volans now appears to be disavowing the social and political considerations that played a large role in the composition of these pieces...his main concerns today, he says, are formal.”

For Taylor, this shift from a ‘local identity’ (Volans considering himself an African composer reconciling two disparate musical traditions) to a ‘universal identity’ (Volans’ “emptying [his own works] of everything except formal values” according to Taylor) based upon broad notions of art is where Taylor finds Volans guilty of hegemonic cultural appropriation. “But, in the end, Volans can’t win,” Taylor writes. (A deeper inquiry into Volans’ aesthetic shift and Taylor’s conclusion based on this shift appears in Chapter 5.)

Bräuninger’s impassioned, overt contempt and Taylor’s erudite, yet bordering on abstruse, criticism left Volans’ compositional reputation blemished for the succeeding decade until relatively recently when musicologists, such as Scherzinger, have been returning to Volans’ plight. In “Whose White Man Sleeps,” Scherzinger revisits the claims made by Bräuninger and Taylor as well as those of Walton. Briefly, in his review

44 Taylor, “When We Think,” 518.

45 Taylor, “When We Think,” 519.
Taylor likens these notions to German philosopher Theodor Adorno’s conjectures of art’s aesthetic autonomy that Adorno puts forth in Aesthetic Theory.

46 Taylor, “When We Think,” 517.
of The Duke Quartet’s recording of Volans’ String Quartets 1, 2, and 6, Walton accuses Volans of “cultural banditry” similar to Bräuninger’s charge. Walton declares that Volans’ “plagiarism erases the moral claims” of his music, and even describes a moment in the 1980s when Volans was accused of ‘cultural banditry’ by the South African music establishment.47 Scherzinger attempts to re-evaluate the discussion regarding Volans and cultural appropriation and open the topic for discussion. He faults Bräuninger, Taylor, and Walton (in various ways) for essentially basing their conclusions too heavily on “extra-musical” matters, which are not adequate, in his mind, to the task of musical judgment.48 Scherzinger feels that even Taylor, with his model that encompasses sundry aspects of music, places too much emphasis on Volans’ intentions and not enough emphasis on the actual music. In his essay, Scherzinger offers a seemingly objective look into the “evolving and contradictory history bound up with personal and institutional conflict, negotiations, and appropriations” that surrounds Volans, and also calls for a more serious analysis of Volans’ music.49 While Scherzinger ultimately leaves the convoluted issues surrounding Volans unresolved, he does pave the way for further investigation, both ethically and musically; it is at this juncture that I plan to pursue further consideration of *She Who Sleeps*.

Along with Scherzinger’s critique of the existing criticism’s preoccupation with “extra-musical matters,” the need for additional examination of the actual music in *She Who Sleeps* becomes even more crucial when the fact that these salient essays and others unquestioningly consider *She Who Sleeps* an African Paraphrase when the piece is

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47 Walton, “CD Reivew,” 22-23.


mentioned. Scherzinger briefly refers to the piece in passing as he discusses the “pre-given” African titles of the Paraphrases; Taylor references the work in a comparison to the melodic contour of *Hunting: Gathering*; and in the previously quoted article, “Wild Air – the music of Kevin Volans,” Gilmore groups *She Who Sleeps* with *Matepe* and *White Man Sleeps* in his retrospective look at the Paraphrases. Most of the significant analysis of the Paraphrases concentrates on Volans’ earliest Paraphrase compositions (*Mbira* and *Matepe*) and on his most popular compositions, the string quartets (*White Man Sleeps*, *Hunting: Gathering*, and *Songlines*). The decision by scholars to include *She Who Sleeps* in their Paraphrase discussions, despite their deficient knowledge of the piece as compared to the other Paraphrases, makes *She Who Sleeps* susceptible to their criticisms and justifies the need for a more in-depth study of the piece. By highlighting its similarities to the other Paraphrases, it is hoped that the present study of *She Who Sleeps* will firmly position the piece within the African Paraphrase classification by providing a comprehensive examination of the work as opposed to the scholars’ seeming categorization by association. With this, *She Who Sleeps* will be seen to embody the artistic intentions of Volans and the postmodern ideals of the Cologne School. The differences between *She Who Sleeps* and the other Paraphrases will also be examined. It is these few, but highly significant, differences that exonerate the piece from the scholarly reactions that accuse Volans’ of appropriating African music in his African Paraphrase compositions.
MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF SHE WHO SLEEPS WITH A SMALL BLANKET

Scherzinger notes that Volans’ African Paraphrases “were cast in a Western idiom...[but] drew on distinctly African modes of music-making,” and continues to state that “the source material is overt, literal, almost tangible.”

Scherzinger’s assertion is quite true for the majority of the Paraphrases where Volans uses many literal quotations: mbira dzavadzimu and matepe music from Zimbabwe, lesiba music from Lesotho, and nyanga panpipe music from Mozambique (these being only a handful of select instances). However, with respect to She Who Sleeps, his assertion is not completely accurate; the source material is less literal, more abstract. Volans firmly declares that “the piece itself has nothing to do with African drumming,” and also claims that the title (which comes from a Basotho sekhankula song entitled “He Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket”) is “the only overtly African thing about this piece.”

How is it that a so-called African Paraphrase percussion solo shares no semblance to African drumming? Volans unequivocally states that there are no overt or literal (to use Scherzinger’s terms) quotations of the drumming or musical practices of a single African culture. However, after analyzing She Who Sleeps, it appears that the piece does embody the amalgamation of African and Western-European aesthetics, which was Volans’ primary intent with his African Paraphrase works. Many similarities are found between She Who Sleeps and the other Paraphrases in terms of Volans’ treatment of African musical qualities.


51 Kevin Volans, liner notes for jonny axelsson plays volans and sharman, by Jonny Axelsson, jonny axelsson percussion recordings, 2008, compact disc.
Sleeps contains characteristic formal principles common to the music and art of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as, paraphrases of certain West African talking drum practices.

To dispel any misconception and/or misattribution, when I refer to African music, I am referring to the music of sub-Saharan Africa. Some may cringe at the thought of a generalized overview of African music making claims for Africa’s vast cultural diversity. Although these claims are well-founded and absolutely true, there does exist an African musical typology that should not be overlooked. When considering African music, ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino claims, in *Excursions in World Music* that “these [musical] similarities allow us to speak of ‘African music’ (much as the European harmonic system, among other general traits, allows us to identify mainstream ‘Western music’).” Many scholars view music as one of the strongest unities of Africa. In his seminal work *Studies in African Music*, A.M. Jones writes, “With Africans, music is more permanent than language. The unity of musical practice therefore suggests a common past.” In any case, an African musical typology is crucial to an understanding of She Who Sleeps. Volans himself, as Taylor says in “The Voracious Muse”, ”has a tendency to view the African continent as a totality; he would constantly talk about ‘African’ music and not more local musical styles and sensibilities.” With an examination of the universal formal aesthetics of sub-Saharan African music and the

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52 The music of North Africa is more closely related to music of the Mediterranean countries, as David Locke states in *Worlds of Music* (see bibliography), “North Africa and the Horn of Africa have much in common with the Mediterranean and western Asia; Africa south of the Sahara in many ways is a unique cultural area.”


widespread utilization of assorted ‘talking’ drums in West Africa, new light is shed on the African musical qualities of *She Who Sleeps*.

Myths of African Instrumentation and Cross-Rhythm

With an in-depth discussion of *She Who Sleeps*, focusing particularly on the African facets of the piece, it is important to first examine the salient characteristics of the piece: Volans’ instrumentation and cross-rhythmic patterning that have no immediate connection to African music in order to avoid previous misconceptions or further misunderstanding of the work. Volans clearly states in his Composer’s Note that *She Who Sleeps* was “a composition study for myself by limiting the instrumentation for drums only, with a brief coda on marimba...[In which] I explored several different kinds of patterning, the principal one being cross-rhythms in triplets played with two sticks.”56 With its “overtly” African title, it is easy to assume that *She Who Sleeps*, composed primarily as a study in cross-rhythmic patterning, incorporates ‘African’ drums and aspects of African music’s oft-cited cross-rhythmic or polyrhythmic quality. However, with a basic understanding of the instruments in the piece and African polyrhythm, it becomes clear that Volans’ instrumentation is strictly Western and his cross-rhythmic passages produce results that are quite far removed from those of the similarly-named rhythmic technique in African music.

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In his review of *She Who Sleeps* for the *Buffalo News*, Kenneth Young tersely describes *She Who Sleeps* as "a work for African drums." Young’s statement appears to refer literally to the instruments of the piece: two pairs of bongos, two congas (specifically, one conga and one tumba), a bass drum, and a marimba. All of these instruments (excluding the bass drum) are frequently thought to stem from a strictly African heritage; however, their pedigree is much more diverse. Hand drum expert Nolan Warden writes in *Percussive Notes* that “the conga drum may be one of the most misunderstood percussion instruments.” Warden explains that “many sources only speak about the Bantu (aka Congolese) origins of the *tumbadoras* [the Spanish, and more accurate, term for congas].” Warden continues to explain that the “tumbadora is a truly hybrid instrument, the result of many African and Cuban influences.” What we think of as traditional congas are derived from those that were developed around the turn of the twentieth century in Cuba. Like the conga drums, bongos have developed from Latin American and African influences and share a similar sense of misconception to that of the congas. Additionally, the modern ‘Western’ marimba stems from African and Central American (namely, Guatemalan) influences. While these instruments have non-Western origins, over time they have been incorporated into the standard repertoire of Western percussion instruments. To consider these instruments exclusively African, as Young does, is a glaring oversight. Given that one of Volans’ main Paraphrase intentions was to


write specifically for Western instruments, it appears that *She Who Sleeps*, like the other Paraphrases, fulfills this intention with its instrumentation.

To consider the cross-rhythmic techniques that Volans employs in *She Who Sleeps* as solely African is another glaring oversight, as the outcome of said techniques in the piece are quite different than those of African music. The general principle of cross-rhythms encompasses two rhythmic techniques: 1) the shifting of a beat or grouping of beats in a metric pattern to points ahead or behind their normal position in that pattern so as to contradict the metric pulse, and 2) the superposition of conflicting rhythmic divisions (also referred to as polyrhythm).\(^{61}\) The cross-rhythmic techniques often found in African music cause much of this music to be classified as polymetric, simultaneously using different meters, as seemingly opposing rhythms in often differing metrical patterns are concurrently played by the various instruments in an ensemble; essentially, both of the cross-rhythmic techniques defined work in tandem to create the polymetric quality.\(^{62}\)

In *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, John Miller Chernoff, highlighting this central characteristic of African music, writes that “the effect of polymetric music is as if the different rhythms [are] competing for our attention. No sooner do we grasp one rhythm than we lose track of it and hear another.”\(^{63}\) However, this interplay of rhythm is

\(^{61}\) *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Cross-rhythm,” (ed. by Deane L. Roote), www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed March 19, 2011). See also, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, s.v. “Cross-rhythm,” (ed. by Alison Latham), www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed March 19, 2011). Generally sources only define cross-rhythm as one of the two rhythmic techniques I have stated; however, as both techniques are pertinent to my topic, I have included both techniques as a type of composite definition for cross-rhythm. In regards to my composite definition, the first technique of my cross-rhythm definition came from *New Grove Online*, and the second technique came from *The Oxford Companion to Music*.


purposely sought and is a central aesthetic in most sub-Saharan African music. C.K Ladzekpo, the director of the African music program at the University of California at Berkley, states that "by the nature of the desired resultant rhythm, the normal beat scheme cannot be separated from the secondary beat scheme[s]. It is the interplay of the two elements that produces the cross-rhythmic texture." To see a basic example of the cross-rhythmic traits common to African music, let us look at Chernoff’s supporting drums transcription of an Ewe dance called Agbekor (see Example 1).

Example 1. Agbekor dance as notated by John Miller Chernoff

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65 Chernoff, African Rhythm and Sensibility, 49.
The rattle and handclaps supply the metrical pulse that the other instruments play around. In relation to this pulse, various cross-rhythmic traits are found between the instruments, such as the *totogi* and *kroboto* parts which are based upon 3 over 2 polyrhythms against the rattle and handclaps. Additionally, the bell pattern (though open to many different interpretations) is based around the cross-rhythmic shifting of two 3 over 2 polyrhythms. A 3 over 2 polyrhythm begins the pattern on the first beat as the first three bell notes are a quarter note apart and are pitted against the dotted-quarter note pulse of the rattle and handclaps. Instead of continuing the 3 over 2 pattern of the first polyrhythm (by beginning another 3 over 2 polyrhythm on beat three), the pattern is shifted ahead one eighth note by beginning the next polyrhythmic grouping of three notes on the third eighth-note partial of beat two. This second polyrhythmic group ends on the fourth beat leaving an eighth-note pickup (which can be seen as a continuation of the second polyrhythmic group) at the end of the pattern to lead into the next measure.

Though the rhythms played by the various instruments in this example may seem contradictory, shifting in and out of each other, they are not meant to be heard individually; it is the composite whole that is important (in accordance with Ladzekpo’s claim, their rhythmic schemes “cannot be separated”).

*She Who Sleeps* incorporates both aspects of cross-rhythmic techniques; however, they produce musical results that are quite different than those found in Africa and seen in Chernoff’s transcription (Example 1). To begin, with only one percussionist and two sticks (for most of the piece), it is nearly impossible to create the complexly-layered resultant rhythms of African music that often require the participation of numerous musicians. As Volans writes in his Composer’s Note, *She Who Sleeps* contains mostly

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66 Ladzekpo, “Rhythmic Principles.”
triplet-based cross-rhythm, employing the first type of cross-rhythm technique presented (a metrically shifting beat within a regular pulse). The climactic Molto vivace, ben ritmico section of the piece, mm. 199-228, marks the full fruition of this technique, as Volans writes blistering, double-forte triplets across the drums.67

The entire section (mm. 199-228) is essentially based on the cross-rhythmic grouping of eighth-note triplets off the third partial of an eighth-note triplet instead of the first, i.e., the groupings are metrically shifted ahead two partials of an eighth-note triplet (see Example 2). With a single, rhythmic pattern such as this, there really is no resultant rhythm; the rhythm heard is the rhythm played. Even when Volans explores the polyrhythmic aspect of cross-rhythms which naturally create resultant rhythms because of the superposition of conflicting rhythmic patterns, he is not concerned with the composite sound, instead he is concerned with highlighting specific separate lines within the cross-rhythm. (Notice the accented bottom line in Example 3 below.)

Example 2. Kevin Volans: She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket, m. 19968

Example 3. Kevin Volans: She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket, mm. 45-49


68 Volans, She Who Sleeps, 3.
Volans utilizes various polyrhythms throughout the piece; however, he predominantly uses polyrhythms based over groupings of 5. As seen in Example 3: 5 over 2, found on beats one and two in mm. 45, 48, 49, as well as m. 62 (not shown in example); implied 5 over 4, found in m. 52 (also not shown) with the bottom line entering on the second eighth-note partial of beat two. If Volans was even slightly attempting to write the piece utilizing African cross-rhythmic techniques, he would have presumably used a plethora of 3 over 2 polyrhythmic patterns because African music’s penchant for the 3 over 2 polyrhythm is extremely well-documented. Preeminent African musicologist Kofi Agawu considers the 3 over 2 polyrhythm the “generative or theoretical form” of sub-Saharan rhythmic principles.\textsuperscript{69} He writes in \textit{Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries} that “the resultant [3 over 2] rhythm holds the key to understanding.”\textsuperscript{70} While \textit{She Who Sleeps} and many African musics both employ seemingly similar cross-rhythmic techniques by definition, the applications of and results procured by such techniques in \textit{She Who Sleeps} are drastically different than those found in African music. Rather, the African aspects of \textit{She Who Sleeps} begin to be illuminated by examining the African formal qualities and aesthetics that Volans incorporates in the piece.

Influence of African ‘Formlessness’

In striking similarity to the other African Paraphrase pieces, \textit{She Who Sleeps} incorporates Volans’ intention of musical ‘formlessness,’ an intention that was heavily


\textsuperscript{70} Agawu, \textit{Representing African Music}, 92.
influenced by his study of African music and visual art. As previously discussed, the African perception of time captured Volans. He viewed this variant perception as the ‘essence’ of African music—“the way it unfolds in time...its open-ended quality” as Gilmore relates. Research by ethnomusicologist John Blacking of the South African Venda tribe helped shape Volans’ understanding of the African perception of time and form. Citing Blacking in his article “Of White Africans and White Elephants,” Volans states that “[Blacking] found that the musicians were unable to isolate an individual pattern that they were repeating, nor appeared to be aware that there were periods of time in which patterns were recurring.” Blacking proclaimed that repetition, in the Western sense, is perceived by an African as a “continuous flowing movement like a waterfall.” Complementing these aspects of African music are the asymmetrical patterns found in African visual art (particularly in masks and textiles), which, as Taylor describes, also influenced Volans’ understanding of the African perception of form and time. This concept of “formal asymmetry,” as Taylor writes, that is widely spread throughout African music and visual art is found ubiquitously within Volans’ African Paraphrase pieces, including *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket.*

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73 Volans, “Of White African and White Elephants.”


76 Taylor, “When We Think,” 511.
With his extensive fieldwork and research completed for the WDR in the late 70s, Volans became particularly interested in the music of the African lamellophone called mbira—namely, the mbira music of the Shona (Bantu-speaking people of Zimbabwe). By learning to play the mbira, Volans garnered first-hand experience with the African formal qualities that interested him. Volans’ first two African Paraphrases, *Mbira* (1980) and *Matepe* (1980) (both written for two retuned harpsichords and rattles and *Matepe* supplemented by a viola da gamba), are arranged quotations of mbira music of the Shona (Zimbabwe). He found this ‘formlessness’ in the open-ended and cyclical, yet constantly varying, repetition of the Shona mbira pieces. Of Volans’ mbira realization *Matepe* (the title refers to a certain type of mbira), Gilmore writes that it is a “gorgeous result” of Volans’ implementation of the open-ended quality characteristic to African music.

Gilmore continues to explain that in *Matepe* “the form of the piece is created spontaneously by the musicians as they play, by freely choosing how many times they want to repeat material, or which notated patterns they want to combine together at a given moment.” Unlike the open-ended *Matepe*, the repeated sections of *She Who Sleeps* are given a definite number of intended repeats, and there is no place in the piece where the performer is allowed to choose combinations of desired patterns to play. However, the first recording of *She Who Sleeps* by percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky (to whom the piece was dedicated and who premiered the piece in Salzburg on October 22, 1985) does incorporate the African formal features seen in *Matepe*. In the first several measures of Schulkowsky’s recording, she freely adds notes—bass drum notes (notated as an A below the staff if looking at the piece in treble clef) on beat three of m. 4 and beat

one of m. 5 (all repetitions)—and chooses the number of repetitions given to a repeated section—m. 5 is repeated three times instead of the marked two times. Schulkowsky only repeats m. 34 seven times, not fourteen times as marked, and even changes the placement of the low drum by striking the second lowest drum instead of the lowest on the second and third repetitions. Similarly, m. 35 is repeated twenty-seven times instead of twenty-eight; m. 220 is repeated thirty-three times instead of thirty, and throughout the piece, she adds other various bass drum notes and alterations to the placement of notes, playing them on different drums. While these instances could lead one to believe that Schulkowsky’s recording is inaccurate, she worked closely with Volans on the piece. In my correspondence with Volans, when asked what qualities of the percussion medium interest him, Volans responded that “in writing percussion, one has to work closely with the performer.” He commented further to explain that “Robyn had over 400 instruments in her collection...It’s impossible to know what there is available, without hearing what the player has to offer.” Therefore, Schulkowsky’s ‘spontaneous’ form and note alterations were more than likely supported by the composer.

When comparing She Who Sleeps to Volans’ African Paraphrase White Man Sleeps, there are compositional similarities that reinforce the African aesthetics of artistic

78 Robyn Schulkowsky (percussion), Black Light, Sony 1985B 3634, 1985, compact disc.

79 Volans, e-mail message to author.

80 Volans, e-mail message to author.

81 Volans provides further commentary regarding his close work with percussionists when he discusses his percussion solo Akrodha, as presented on Jonny Axelsson’s website (see bibliography): “As often the case with percussion music, the piece was written blind: the first draft is little more than a proposal to the percussionist, who lets the composer know what is impossible and what isn’t. Despite working with percussion for many years, I have always underestimated both the players abilities and the demands I make upon them.” From this statement, Volans’ substantial interaction and planning with the percussionist is evident.
asymmetry and musical formlessness. In his analysis of *White Man Sleeps*, Taylor explains that “...the sections of ... [the first movement of] *White Man Sleeps* are marked to be repeated different numbers of times: the first section (marked “A” in the score) is to be repeated 4 times; “B,” 6 times; “C,” 2 times, and so on.”82 (See mm. 1-3 of *White Man Sleeps* in Appendix B). If one looks at the first section, mm. 1-68, of *She Who Sleeps*, equivalent indications are found: m. 5 is marked to repeated 2 times; m.7, 3 times; m. 8, 5 times; mm. 9-12, 2 times, and so forth. (See mm. 1-68 of *She Who Sleeps* in Appendix C). The first section and various other sections of *She Who Sleeps* as well as select movements of *White Man Sleeps* all use this type of formal delineation, i.e., a series of repeated sections with drastically varying numbers of intended repetitions. Taylor shares that “The varying number of sections is akin to the lack of symmetrical formal patterns in African textiles that had influenced Volans’ notions of form.”83 These repeated sections of different lengths also elicit the sense of “continuous flowing movement like a waterfall” that is part of African music as stated by Blacking; some phrases in *She Who Sleeps* are marked to be repeated for extended periods of time: m. 61 and m. 220 are repeated thirty times. Furthermore, Volans describes the African conceptions of time and space in music as having “no sense of proportion, which means no sense of form. It’s a series of images.” The various repeated sections placed one after the other are a musically-manifested “series of images.”84 Unrelated in length (and often in content as well), these “images,” ranging from single measures to several systems with

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82 Taylor, “The Voracious Muse,” 33.


84 Taylor, “The Voracious Muse,” 23.
diverse numbers of intended repetitions are evidence that Volans' sought to achieve the African aesthetic of formal asymmetry when composing *She Who Sleeps*.

Influence of African Tonal Languages and Drumming

In his book, *Drumming in the Akan Communities of Ghana*, J. H. Kwabena Nketia states that there are three major styles of African drumming: the dance mode, the signal mode, and the speech mode. The dance style of drumming has been previously discussed in the cross-rhythm section, i.e., many drums simultaneously playing with a resultant polymetric texture (see Example 1). The other two styles of African drumming demonstrate the communicative power of the drum in Africa. Certain pitched drums, predominantly in West Africa (such as the Yoruban *dùndùn* and the Dagbamba *lunga*), are able to produce multiple pitches, and these types of drums are used to imitate speech. These ‘talking’ drums are able to talk because many of the languages spoken in Africa are tonal; that is, as Thomas Turino explains, a word’s meaning “depends on the relative pitches applied to given syllables.” Along with this tonal aspect, African languages often rely heavily on a certain sense of ‘rhythm.’ In *African Rhythm*, Kofi Agawu identifies three qualities that constitute the ‘rhythm’ of African language: “stress” (the relative accent of syllables), “quantity” (the relative duration of syllables), and “resultant pattern” (basically, the result of various stress and duration combinations).

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Talking drums have the ability to accurately render both the tonal and rhythmic factors of the many African languages.

Influences and paraphrases of the speech and signal modes of African talking drums are discernable in *She Who Sleeps*. In regards to the speech mode of drumming, Nketia writes that “In the speech mode of drumming there is a steady flow of drum beats, the durations of which are made to correspond or very nearly correspond to the relative durations of the syllables of the spoken word.”\(^{89}\) Nketia’s description aptly describes mm. 176-198 of *She Who Sleeps* where Volans inserts a descriptive tempo marking, “In speech rhythm.”\(^{90}\) Nketia also provides an example of a common speech mode rhythmic scheme of the Akan *atumpan*, a set of two large tuned drums that are used as speech surrogates in the Akan community (see Example 4).

Example 4. J.H. Nketia’s extract of the atumpan drum language\(^{91}\)

\[^{89}\] Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 22.


\[^{91}\] Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 25.
This example features the pitch-changing, unilineal rhythms (a term employed by Nketia that basically describes a single rhythmic line played by one or many drums) in additive rhythmic groupings that are characteristic of speech drumming.\(^92\) Nketia describes that additive rhythm is when “note values and/or the phrase groupings do not correlate with the regular divisions of the given time span.”\(^93\) Also, the additive groupings of speech drumming are dictated “by the phrase and sentence divisions of the speech...regularity or irregularity of phrasing follows the ‘prosodic’ arrangement of speech,” Nketia explains.\(^94\)

The “In speech rhythm” section of *She Who Sleeps* uses similar additive rhythmic groupings resembling the techniques seen in Nketia’s example (see Example 5).

Example 5. Kevin Volans: *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, mm. 176-182

Though Volans frequently switches the underlying meter (or total number of eighth notes in a measure), much of this section is in 4/4, such as mm. 176-178, 182, and 186. As seen in m. 182 (and many of the other measures in this section), Volans groups the notes into short phrases that constantly switch between single, double, and triple-grouped

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\(^{92}\) In *Drumming in Akan Communities*, Nketia explains that the two tones of the atumpan in his extraction imitate the two-toned framework on which Akan speech is based.


\(^{94}\) Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities*, 22.
eighth notes, and that do not directly correlate to the regular divisions of the implied meter (similar to Nketia’s example). Also, the repeated pitches and the notes followed by a rest are analogous to the quarter notes in Nketia’s example. While not a single drum, the two voices in the double stops that Volans scores throughout the section follow the same rhythmic pattern and melodic contour (essentially heterophonic) and can, thereby, be considered unilineal as it resembles two drummers playing the same pattern. This unilineal nature gives the impression of unified pitch changes. This section of *She Who Sleeps* illustrates Volans deftly paraphrasing African speech drumming through his incorporation of unlineal rhythms and additive rhythmic groupings.

While conducting his initial research of African music in Cologne, Volans revealed that he “missed the sound of Zulu being spoke, of Zulu guitar music” of his home, South African composer Peter Klatzow notes.⁹⁵ To seemingly satisfy this desire to hear an African language, Volans specifically adds click-like sounds to *She Who Sleeps* (according to linguists Keith Brown and Sarah Ogilvie, one of the most notable characteristics of the Zulu language is the use of so-called click consonants) and thereby strengthens the correlations with the Zulu language.⁹⁶ Mm. 229-267 are a variation of the “In speech rhythm” section discussed earlier (demonstrating unilineal and additive rhythmic features) and with this section, Volans has the performer pick up a third hard xylophone mallet that adds a quasi-click sound, reminiscent of the Zulu language, to the texture (see Example 6). One might wonder about Volans’ apparent coalescence of talking drum influences from West Africa and the Zulu language of South Africa;

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however, both the Zulu language and those of the West African tribes that use talking drums are part of the Niger-Congo language family sharing many similarities. Also, in this section of the piece, Volans adds breath marks in mm. 236, 243, and 245, presenting yet another prosodic characteristic.

Example 6. Kevin Volans: *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, mm. 229-231

The last drum section (mm. 302-385) before the ending marimba segment can be viewed as Volans’ interpretation of the signal mode of talking drums. Like the town crier of an African village who disseminates verbal messages in a coded form, talking drums also transmit coded messages but over a much greater distance. Turino explains how the messages are coded, “Because many words share the same number of syllables and tonal contours, the meaning of a given ‘word’ (drummed tonal pattern) can be clarified by following it with a formula of its own (e.g., “cat” might become “cat walks quietly at night”).” Volans’ title, *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, shares some resemblance to this formulaic construction of words. In *African Rhythm*, Agawu states that both signal drumming and speaking consist of “temporal...segments of comparable length” with “a rhetorical use of silence [between the segments] to arrest listeners’ attention” (see Example 7). The last drumming section of *She Who Sleeps* is set in a strikingly similar manner with nearly equal segments of rhythm interspersed with silence (see Example 8).

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Volans also incorporates the rhythmic qualities (namely, “stress” and “quantity”) of African language as identified by Agawu. He adds staccato and accent markings to numerous notes which relate directly to the “stress” quality. Additionally, there are several notes with prolonged or reduced time durations (the emphasis is on the length of a heard note, not necessarily on its rhythmic properties) that relate to the “quantity” quality of African language. Both qualities are illustrated in Example 9: “stress” in m. 341 with the staccato markings and “quantity” in m. 340 with the dotted rhythm.

Example 7. Kofi Agawu’s transcription of an Akpafu town crier’s announcement

Example 8. Kevin Volans: *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, mm. 309-316

Example 9. Kevin Volans: *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, mm. 340-342

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Given the aforementioned influences of African formal aesthetics and paraphrases of West African tonal drumming melded together with Western-European compositional conventions (Western instrumentation and study in cross-rhythms), She Who Sleeps is clearly situated with the rest of the African Paraphrases. Similar to the other Paraphrases, the piece embodies Volans’ artistic intentions and, thus, conveys the principal message of the Cologne School’s new music. With its ‘African Paraphrase’ status, She Who Sleeps then becomes susceptible to the litany of criticism directed at Volans’ Paraphrase project, particularly that of hegemonic cultural appropriation, as documented in Chapter 2. On the other hand, She Who Sleeps does possess certain characteristics that are not attributable to the other African Paraphrases: a greater sense of abstraction and the idiom for which the work was written. These two extremely important characteristics allow She Who Sleeps to be considered differently in regards to the accusations of cultural appropriation that afflict the other Paraphrases.

Dissimilarities of She Who Sleeps with the Other Paraphrases

Volans’ other African Paraphrases are formed around exact to nearly exact quotations of specific African melodies or are paraphrases of a single, specific African style, such as, the exact quotation of Zimbabwean mbira melodies in Mbira and Matepe or the first movement of White Man Sleeps which is a paraphrase of the concertina music in Lesotho. Volans is quite open regarding these African sources. For example, in the prefatory notes to his first two string quartets (White Man Sleeps and Hunting: Gathering), Volans includes a section titled “Sources” that identifies the African sources
he used in composing the works. Volans is ostensibly providing footnotes as a writer would, citing his sources. However, in *She Who Sleeps*, the African sources are more closely intertwined with the Western facets of composition; Western instrumentation and African formal aesthetics form the foundation for the presentation of Western cross-rhythmic study and the conceptually paraphrased episodes of African tonal drumming and language. *She Who Sleeps* manifests a greater sense of abstraction; nonetheless, the relation of the work to its various African influences is never tenuous. With *She Who Sleeps*, Volans is less concerned with the quotation or imitation of a specific sound or source; rather, he is concerned with creating music through the influence of various, more generalized, compositional techniques from African music. Even in the passages of paraphrased African talking drums in *She Who Sleeps*, Volans isn’t merely imitating; he is exploring the different compositional techniques that act as the basis for all West African talking drum music (such as pitch-changing unilineal rhythms, additive rhythmic groupings, the ‘rhythmic’ qualities of African language, and the temporal phrasing of signal drumming). Volans integrates these techniques into the work ultimately creating fascinatingly original thematic material. Ironically, it is this greater sense of abstraction that gives Volans the room to maneuver the dissociation of *She Who Sleeps* from African drumming and music.

In my correspondence with Volans, he openly related that his dissociation of *She Who Sleeps* from African drumming (seen in the Composer’s Note that is included in the score published by Chester Music which is a modified version of an antecedent passage first published in the liner notes to his 1990 recording *Cover Him with Grass*) was a

response to “dumb comments about [the piece’s relation to] African drumming.”

Volans also revealed that he was “quite aggressive” in these notes “because critics (who are the laziest thinkers) see ‘drumming’ and immediately think: ‘Oh, African drumming!’” Kenneth Young’s review of She Who Sleeps (cited earlier in the chapter) that misconstrues the composition as “a work for African drums” is a great example of such lax criticism. Aside from my private correspondence with him, Volans has spoken recurrently and often publicly (listen to his 2008 interview with John Schaefer on WNYC’s New Sounds radio broadcast) about the critics’ heedless assessment of She Who Sleeps. One gets the sense that these ongoing, critical commentaries of She Who Sleeps that easily and incorrectly assume the piece’s overt relationship to African drumming have plagued She Who Sleeps from the beginning. The following combination of factors likely contribute to this inaccurate assumption: misunderstanding of the multiculturalism found in the heritage of percussion instruments and inherent in the percussion idiom, the piece’s African-inspired title, Volans’ African background, and his well-documented utilization of African elements in the other African Paraphrase works.

Suffice it to say that these ill-conceived remarks based on inaccurate assumptions have led to the misrepresentation of She Who Sleeps and Volans’ African Paraphrases as a whole.

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101 Volans, e-mail message to author.
Volans, She Who Sleeps.
Kevin Volans, liner notes for Cover Him with Grass, by Kevin Volans, Landor/Barcelona DTL CD 111, 1990, compact disc.

102 Volans, e-mail message to author.

103 Young, “Percussionist’s Opener.”

104 Kevin Volans, interview by John Schaefer, New Sounds, WYNC, November 26, 2008.
As discussed, Volans treats the African qualities in *She Who Sleeps* with a certain level of abstraction that flawlessly integrates these qualities with Western musical elements. Because of this integration, *She Who Sleeps* seems to showcase an even greater sense of ‘reconciliation’ between African and Western aesthetics than evidenced in Volans’ other African Paraphrases. Therefore, the claims by scholars and critics who maintain *She Who Sleeps*’ consummate relationship to African drumming and music are mistaken observations that ultimately lead to misrepresentation. With this misrepresentation, denigration of the work itself and diminution of his original African Paraphrase intentions eventuates. However, I am not sure that Volans’ aggressive stance in response to the claims by scholars and critics of *She Who Sleeps* relation to African drumming is entirely equal to the measure of misrepresentation, as the work does contain compositional techniques of African music and elements of West African talking drums. In this respect, I tend to view his aggressive stance as his way of protecting the integrity of the work against misinformed, exaggerated comments.

The compositional idiom of *She Who Sleeps* and its idiomatic implications set the piece apart from the other Paraphrases. The idiom or medium used to compose a musical work carries its own ‘implicit meanings’ that are inherently transferred to the work itself; the percussion idiom is particularly susceptible to this implicit transference. It is these idiomatic implications found in *She Who Sleeps* that allow it to surpass the current stigma of cultural appropriation carried by the rest of Volans’ African Paraphrases, and that will ultimately showcase the work as the quintessential African Paraphrase.
CHAPTER 4

THE IDIOMATIC IMPLICATIONS OF *SHE WHO SLEEPS WITH A SMALL BLANKET*

The quotation and paraphrase techniques that form the compositional basis of Volans' African Paraphrases have stimulated serious discussion of their musical and ethical efficacy. More often than not, this discussion has accused Volans of 'cultural banditry' proving ethical abhorrence and musical ineffectiveness. Scherzinger writes that "Volans is accused of appropriation...and far from reversing the colonial moment, Volans is accused of marching in step with the demands of late capital."\(^{105}\) Illegitimate appropriation and hegemony are two issues that Volans wanted to avoid from the onset.

The arguments of Jürgen Bräuninger, Timothy Taylor, and Christopher Walton, discussed in Chapter 2, shared these accusations. While Taylor's argument, centered on Volans' shift of intentions, requires more rumination of Volans' aesthetic shift, Bräuninger and Walton base their conclusions primarily on the highly subjective issue of 'musical plagiarism' where they criticize Volans' compositional techniques (quotation and paraphrase). Given the more abstract treatment of the African influences in *She Who Sleeps* as compared to the other Paraphrases, the notion of contemptible plagiarism becomes questionable; however, this doubt is not sufficient to completely debunk such criticism in regards to the piece. By examining the implications of the percussion idiom (the idiom for which *She Who Sleeps* is written) the applicability of Bräuninger's and Walton's arguments with respect to the piece become naught. The realm of modern percussion is historically founded upon notions of cultural sharing. The significance of this historical foundation can be used to exonerate the compositional aesthetics and

\(^{105}\) Scherzinger, "Whose 'White Man Sleeps'," 210.
techniques Volans uses in *She Who Sleeps* of the criticism akin to that of Bräuninger and Walton.

The Implications of the Modern Western Percussion Idiom

Of percussion music in 1939, the renowned musical experimenter John Cage writes: “Percussion music is revolution.”\(^\text{106}\) In reference to Cage’s dictum, contemporary music specialist, percussionist, and Professor at the University of San Diego, Steven Schick describes in his book *The Percussionist’s Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams*, that the “percussion revolution” bridged style and ideology, class and race and, ultimately, redefined the nature of musical material and outlined an evolving social paradigm.\(^\text{107}\)

While playing of ‘Western’ percussion instruments (namely, the timpani) was commonplace during the days of early composers such as Haydn and Mozart and even J.S. Bach, modern percussion music really began to germinate and flourish after the turn of the twentieth century in the United States of America, spearheaded by the likes of such experimental minds as French-born Edgard Varèse, John Cage, and Henry Cowell.

During this time period, America was marked by a developing deconstruction of cultural boundaries, a rapid move “towards a culturally diverse, polycentric society,” Schick writes, and American percussion music was at the forefront of this social


This chapter is greatly indebted to Steven Schick’s remarkable book as it is currently the only study of its kind. Schick provides detailed analysis and telling inquiry into numerous facets of the modern Western percussion idiom ranging from the conceptual to the practical. The Percussive Arts Society considers Schick’s book “an invaluable resource that can be considered the definitive source of information” concerning the art of percussion performance.
phenomena. Schick explains that American percussion music began to develop conceptually along a pathway of “percussion as new culture,” as the burgeoning modern percussive practice became home to the sounds, aesthetics, and instruments of all musical cultures. “Percussion music has been unique in its capacity to combine diverse cultural elements into a coherent whole,” Schick states. Schick identifies that the basic issue of this early percussion music was “how to reconcile multicultural musical vocabulary within the fundamentally western context of a musical composition.” (This statement shares striking similarity to Volans’ primary African Paraphrase intention: to reconcile African and European aesthetics.) It was in the name of “experimentation” that these young American composers justified their revolutionary techniques. Early percussion pieces, such as Varèse’s Ionisation (1931), Cage’s Third Construction (1941), and Cowell’s Pulse (1939), all utilize multi-cultural instruments and draw upon various compositional techniques and aesthetics from sundry, non-Western musical idioms. For example, Cage expressed a desire to create an Indonesian-inspired ‘Western’ gamelan and Cowell professed a strong interest in the Orient. The early percussion works of Varèse, Cage, and Cowell were born from notions of cultural fluidity. These works, which form the core of the modern percussion repertoire, provide the idiom with an inherent proclivity and freedom for musical exchange among the world’s cultures. “With

108 Schick, The Percussionist’s Art, 36.
109 Schick, The Percussionist’s Art, 36.
110 Schick, The Percussionist’s Art, 36.
111 Schick, The Percussionist’s Art, 58.
many thanks to Varèse, Cage, and Cowell, today’s percussionists enjoy an unprecedented range of cultural exchange,” Schick proclaims.112

In today’s world, with its growing consciousness of cultural exchange and fear of hegemony, this foundational notion of cultural fluidity may seem more like appropriation than sheer experimentation. To deal with this “unprecedented range of cultural exchange” that is inherent in the modern percussion idiom, it is critical to realize that without the “opportunity” of worldwide “cultural exchange” effectively used by Varèse, Cage, and Cowell, the modern Western percussion idiom, as we know it, would not even exist; furthermore, without the opportunity of worldwide cultural exchange used by today’s percussionists, the percussion idiom would cease to evolve.113

In all areas of the modern Western percussion practice (whether it is various techniques, instrumentation, repertoire, or other aspects), myriad influences from the world’s cultures are almost always present, and these influences are in a perpetual state of research, interpretation, and incorporation into the practice. Take for example: the orchestral percussionist researching and learning Middle-Eastern frame drum techniques in order to utilize them with the Western tambourine; the multitude of marimba pieces quoting or paraphrasing African melodies; the jazz drummer’s improvisatory solo where West African bell patterns or Cuban clave rhythms act as the point of departure; the percussion ensemble piece that is an emulation of the Balinese Kecak ritual; the many solo percussion works that utilize an amalgamation of instruments stemming from dozens of different cultures; or Volans’ She Who Sleeps that incorporates paraphrases of talking drums and African formal aesthetics; the list can go on and on. More than any other idiom in the Western

112 Schick, The Percussionist’s Art, 67.

113 Schick, The Percussionist’s Art, 67.
musical tradition, the freedom of cultural exchange found in the modern Western percussion medium is fundamental to its origin, intrinsic to its practice, and ultimately, invaluable for its continued evolution. Given this vast "opportunity of cultural exchange," there is an obvious need for scholars to shift their perspective when considering hegemonic cultural appropriation with respect to the modern percussion idiom.

Works and practices of the percussion idiom, however, are still vulnerable to crossing the line from cultural sharing to hegemonic appropriation if certain requirements are not met. Schick maintains that the "opportunity of cultural exchange" in the modern percussion idiom needs to be balanced with "the need for stewardship of diversity." With the "need for stewardship of diversity," Schick is suggesting that in order for a musical exchange between cultures to be successful in the percussion idiom, there needs to be a sense of cultural and musical deference emanating from the borrowing composer or performer as well as a resultant 'resonance' heard in the final product. Composer Steve Reich comments on such considerations when discussing his work *Drumming* (1971) that was written after his trip to Ghana where he studied African drumming. Reich is often asked about the role African music played in *Drumming*. Responding to such inquiries, in an eloquently articulate statement that appears in his *Writings on Music*, Reich writes that "The question often arises as to what the influence my visit to Africa in the summer of 1970 had on *Drumming*? The answer is confirmation." By incorporating and re-contextualizing African musical ideas and practices in *Drumming*,

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Reich sought to confirm the African influences in his music and ultimately produce a sense of resonance. To achieve this resonance, the re-contextualized African material was fused with Western elements in ways that created new and meaningful results, and that otherwise would not have been created by either musical tradition alone. In other words, the result is greater and different than the sum of its parts. When discussing his treatment of non-Western influences in his music, Reich states that he wanted to create "something genuinely new." For Schick, this resonance heard in Drumming, "reinforce[s] strands of connection…and tap[s] a musically sustaining pool of musical wisdom" between the Western and African musical traditions, thus, between the two traditions of percussion. Through his desire to confirm the African influences and to create an original and "genuinely new" musical work with Drumming, Reich fulfills Schick's "need for the stewardship of diversity" in the modern percussion idiom.

On the other hand, musical compositions in the modern percussion idiom that are perceived to fall short in creating this resonance, or new and meaningful results, from the interaction of the original and borrowed music, or do not satisfy "the stewardship of diversity," may become vulnerable to accusations of musical plagiarism and cultural appropriation. Given this possibility, how is the "stewardship of diversity" assessed? An evaluation of the merit of the composer's intentions and the music itself (a determination of its 'resonance') can be used to assess the "stewardship of diversity."

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118 Schick provides an example of such an instance where a work falls short in creating the sought resonance. He writes of a performance by an American percussion ensemble from a well-known university in which a standard blues progression was rendered on the instruments of a Balinese gamelan. "The piece...managed to diminish the blues, the tradition of the gamelan, and the worthy history of the percussion ensemble in western classical music all in one blow," Schick writes. (Schick, *The Percussionist's Art*, 240.)
While these compositional assessments are outwardly subjective and perhaps susceptible to comments suggesting a lack of rigorousness, I believe it is possible with considerable evidence to make a decision, using these compositional assessments, regarding how a piece satisfies the “need for stewardship of diversity,” and ultimately, deciding whether a piece crosses the line from cultural sharing to cultural appropriation given the resulting balance between the “opportunity for cultural exchange” and the “need for the stewardship of diversity.” With respect to the modern Western percussion idiom where multicultural exchange is intrinsic to the idiom, I also believe that such a decision is necessary in order to substantiate the need for scholars to shift their perspective when examining notions of cultural appropriation in modern Western percussion compositions. Therefore, it becomes necessary to see how She Who Sleeps measures up to Schick’s stipulation of the “need for the stewardship of diversity” before it can be exonerated from the acts of cultural appropriation of which Volans is accused.

As previously concluded, She Who Sleeps is an African Paraphrase and, hence, being a Paraphrase, She Who Sleeps originated from the virtuous artistic intentions that Volans maintained at the onset of his Paraphrase project. This conclusion substantiates the merit of Volans’ intentions. Similar to the cultural deference addressed in Reich’s comments about Drumming, the artistic intentions with which Volans imbued She Who Sleeps share a similar disposition for the respect of African cultural and musical traditions—a desire to reconcile African and European aesthetics by specifically composing music in such a way that it does not represent any sense of European hegemonic ideology. With Volans’ “reconciliation” and Reich’s “confirmation,” both composers sought to create music that would generate a ‘resonance’ between Western
and non-Western facets and produce entirely new and original work. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Volans brilliantly treats the African musical qualities in *She Who Sleeps* with a measure of abstraction. Unlike the overt specificity of the quotations and paraphrases found in the other African Paraphrases that brings many of these works to the brink of bland, exploitative imitation (as noted by Bräuninger), Volans’ abstraction in *She Who Sleeps* faultlessly integrates the African with the Western creating a highly original and innovative piece. However, because this is my conclusion drawn from my previous analysis, to truly evaluate the constitutional merit of the musical content in *She Who Sleeps*, it is necessary to justify my assertion with corroboration from other sources. Despite the lack of serious consideration and analysis the work has received from scholars and musicologists, *She Who Sleeps* has garnered extolment from the most influential and respected minds of the percussion medium. This praise particularly lauds Volans’ brilliant treatment of African musical qualities in *She Who Sleeps*, considering the piece a modern classic. With verifiable evidence of the music’s merit from the thoughts and reactions of professionals working in the Western percussion idiom (confirming my analysis) coupled with Volans’ well-documented African Paraphrase intentions, *She Who Sleeps* possesses those qualities required to fulfill “the need for the stewardship of diversity” in the Western percussion idiom.

Impressions of the Professionals

Since its composition in 1985, the world’s premiere percussionists have applauded *She Who Sleeps*. The work appears in the active solo repertoire of such luminary performers as Robyn Schulkowsky, Jonny Axelsson, Morris Palter, James
Campbell, Beverley Johnston, Claire Edwardes, Arnold Marinissen, Pedro Carneiro, Mathias Reumert, among others. Presently, there are many new works of percussion that possess far less performance integrity than *She Who Sleeps*. The long term and worldwide presence of *She Who Sleeps* accords the work a masterpiece status within the percussion repertoire. This acclaim is vitally linked to the superior compositional integrity of the piece that results from Volans’ ‘resonant’ assimilation of African musical features within a Western context.

Schick makes reference to *She Who Sleeps* in his discussion of the difficulties of composing “longer, more formally complex” pieces in the percussion world. Schick explains that “many composers solve this problem by adopting preexisting compositional or cultural models.”  

Schick’s primary example of a composer availing himself of this method is Kevin Volans. “This method has produced a lot of good music. Among the finer examples [is] Kevin Volans’ *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, which draws upon the composer’s African heritage.”

Perhaps even more telling than Schick’s compliment, is the Percussive Arts Society’s (PAS) inclusion of *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* in the 2008 Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC) Focus Day showcase. Describing Focus Day 2008, titled “Out of Africa: Exploring African influence in contemporary percussion music,” Professor of Percussion at The Hartt School Benjamin Toth writes:

Focus Day 2008...will showcase solo and ensemble music that explores and celebrates the influence of Africa on 20th- and 21st-century Western classical percussion music. The African connection may be present in the compositions themselves and/or in the instruments used...In total, the day will include more

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119 Schick, *The Percussionist’s Art*, 224.

120 Schick, *The Percussionist’s Art*, 224.
than 30 original compositions inspired by African musics, instruments, and/or aesthetics.\(^{121}\)

Closing the first session of the day was percussionist Rick Kurasz performing *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, which Toth describes as a “landmark work.” The most prominent organization in the percussion world praises Volans by showcasing *She Who Sleeps* as a work that brilliantly treats African music and aesthetics within a Western context.

Given the merit of Volans’ intentions in composing the African Paraphrases and the laudatory reception of *She Who Sleeps* in the Western percussion community, it is readily apparent that Volans perfectly balances the Western percussion idiom’s opportunity for worldwide musical exchange with an exceptional presentation of the idiomatic need for cultural stewardship. In this context, *She Who Sleeps* satisfies the criteria for scholars to shift their perspective when examining notions of cultural appropriation in the Western percussion idiom. In *She Who Sleeps*, Volans inimitably re-contextualizes African musical qualities and influences into a work that is securely fashioned in the modern Western percussion idiom, an idiom founded upon the awareness and near expectedness of cultural sharing. It is in this light that *She Who Sleeps* can be exonerated from the claims of cultural appropriation attributed to the other African Paraphrases, as purported by Bräuninger and Walton, which may be associated to the piece.

\(^{121}\) Toth, “Out of Africa,” 8.
CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING THE DISCOURSE OF KEVIN VOLANS

Nearly all aspects of the expanded version of Taylor’s “theoretical model for looking at music” have been examined with the ultimate intent of this paper to illuminate *She Who Sleeps* as Volans’ quintessential African Paraphrase. Volans’ artistic intentions fueled by the Cologne School’s postmodernism have been discussed; the reactions of scholars, critics, and the percussion community have been detailed; an in-depth analysis of the work has been presented highlighting the African influences; and the idiomatic implications inherent in the percussion idiom have been disclosed. With the coalescence of the above material in reference to *She Who Sleeps*, the piece can now be considered a true African Paraphrase intrinsically realizing the foundational intentions of the Paraphrases, and, most importantly, unlike Volans’ other African Paraphrases, *She Who Sleeps* is granted impunity in the face of popular accusations of cultural appropriation by virtue of its placement in the Western percussion idiom and its manifestation of Western percussion idiomatic implications. *She Who Sleeps* already seems to represent an unmarked presentation of Volans’ artistic purpose circa his involvement with the Cologne School. However, before this claim can be conclusive, and the piece can be considered Volans’ quintessential African Paraphrase, the comments offered by Volans after his ‘aesthetic shift’ in the early 1990s where he disavows his African Paraphrase works and specifically disassociates *She Who Sleeps* from African music and drumming need to be managed. Volans ostensibly leads one to believe that the principal intentions founding the African Paraphrases (as well as *She Who Sleeps*) are null and should not be
taken into account when considering the Paraphrases. Furthermore, with this discussion, the criticism of Timothy Taylor, alluded to earlier, will also be covered, as Taylor bases his claim of cultural appropriation on utterances made by Volans after his shift of aesthetics.

Aesthetic Shift

It is hard to ignore Volans’ stream of utterances that have become more dogmatic over time, initially affirming that She Who Sleeps has no relation to African drumming, and now extending this dissociation to African music in general. In the previously discussed program notes for She Who Sleeps originating from those in the liner notes of his 1990 recording Cover Him with Grass, Volans declared that the piece has no relation to African drumming.\footnote{Kevin Volans, liner notes for Cover Him with Grass, by Kevin Volans. Landor/Barcelona DTL CD 111, 1990, compact disc.} In the 2008 New Sounds interview, Volans expanded this disassociation not just to African drumming but to African compositional techniques as well. Schaefer asked Volans, “When people hear drums in your music...do they automatically think, ‘Yup, he’s got the African thing going again’?” and Volans immediately responded, “Yes, they do, and it drives me absolutely nuts...the simplicity of thinking always gets me!”\footnote{Volans, interview with John Shaefer.} Volans, describing his ‘drum’ works, claimed that they were written for Western drums such as the congas and were created from “compositional techniques that have nothing to do with Africa at all.”\footnote{Volans, interview with John Schaefer.} Additionally, in my recent correspondence with Volans this past year, I asked: “Does She Who Sleeps
contain any of the African compositional techniques that you were using in your other pieces of the 1980s, or was the piece solely a compositional study exploring several kinds of patterning as you wrote in the Composer’s Note?” Volans responded that “the piece bears no relationship” to African drumming, and continued to state that “the piece has no real or indirect connection with African music.” What has caused Volans’ continually evolving stringency in regards to _She Who Sleeps_? Volans’ statements regarding _She Who Sleeps_ were previously found to be reactive to “some dumb comments about African drumming.” However, these comments are part of a larger reactive, and evolving discourse that Volans began in the early 1990s when he suddenly shifted his views regarding his African Paraphrase works. It is with this aesthetic shift that Volans has continued to remove many of the original African connotations from his African Paraphrase pieces, ultimately, disavowing these works and considering them “middlebrow music.” Volans’ separation of _She Who Sleeps_ from various musical guises of Africa can be seen as a product of this significant alteration of his artistic outlook.

Taylor draws attention to a 1991 BBC radio broadcast as one of the first public indications that Volans’ view of Africa, his African Paraphrase pieces, and his general artistic aesthetics were shifting. During this broadcast, Volans said, in a striking response, that he has come to realize that “although I come from Africa, my artistic roots are really Western. I think of all these pieces [the African Paraphrases] now as strictly

125 Volans, e-mail message to author.

126 Klatzow, *Composers in South Africa*, 221.
Western.”127 This broadcast presaged Volans’ startling aesthetic shift where Volans shifts from what Taylor describes as a “local” to a “universal” artistic identity where Volans’ “main concerns” are “formal.”128 To elucidate the startling difference in Volans’ view of his work, Taylor discusses Volans’ descriptions, one from an interview with Taylor in 1989 and the other from the same BBC interview, of the first dance of White Man Sleeps. In the 1989 interview, Volans is quite forthcoming about the African aspects of the work as he explained that the central chords in the work were derived from a concertina player he had heard and admired in Lesotho. In the radio broadcast, Volans stated that while there are some African elements in the work, the first dance of White Man Sleeps is a compositional exercise with “strictly Western concerns” as it is an “exercise in writing a whole movement with only two chords.”129 What was once a study of the integration of African elements into a Western context has now become strictly a ‘formal’ Western compositional exercise; Volans is silencing or distancing the work from its ‘local’ African sources. Moreover, to provide an example of how Volans’ discourse surrounding She Who Sleeps fits in with his shifted viewpoint, the description of White Man Sleeps as a compositional exercise is analogous to his description of She Who Sleeps in the modified program note found in the score as a “compositional study in cross-rhythmic triplets.”130

With this shift of aesthetics, Volans no longer considers the Paraphrases from the perspective of an ‘African’ composer (a facet of his original Paraphrase intentions), but

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127 Taylor, “When We Think,” 518.
128 Taylor, “When We Think,” 519.
129 Taylor, “When We Think,” 519.
130 Volans, She Who Sleeps.
distances himself to “inhabit the nation of art” according to Taylor. Volans’ move to these broader, very Western-based aesthetics is where Taylor faults him for cultural appropriation and hegemony. In Taylor’s mind, the early African Paraphrase works of Volans, who now views his Paraphrases as completely Western constructs, are now imbued with the multitude of controversial implications found in the circumstance of a Western composer duplicating African melodies and aesthetics in his Western works. Taylor writes that “Volans wanted to avoid making hegemonic music with his appropriations, but this is virtually impossible given the history of the Western cultural system: the artist as the hyper-individual who is thought to be in a position to offer great insights into the human condition.”

Martin Scherzinger criticizes Taylor and other scholars for basing their conclusions too heavily on the “extra-musical,” specifically finding fault with Taylor’s “crude psychological model of ‘intentions’ that becomes the primary site of the music’s politics” and the crux of his argument. I concur. Taylor places too much emphasis on Volans’ ‘intentions.’ Taylor’s conclusion uses only a portion of his suggested model as his conclusion is strictly based on the inconsistency of Volans’ discourse with respect to the African Paraphrases before and after his aesthetic shift. Taylor extrapolates this inconsistency through an overtly literal and objective rendering of Volans’ shifted aesthetics. However, can one really accept Volans’ shifted aesthetics in regards to the African Paraphrases? Perhaps more than any other piece, She Who Sleeps has found itself at the mercy of Volans’ aesthetic shift. The flagrant contradiction that arises

131 Taylor, “When We Think,” 522.
132 Taylor, “When We Think,” 517.
between this paper’s elucidation of the substantial African influence found in *She Who Sleeps* and Volans’ aesthetically shifted viewpoint that the piece has no indirect or direct relation to African music at all is grounds alone for an inquiry into the validity of Volans’ shifted statements.

Volans’ aesthetic shift has been, in part, a reactive response to the international recognition garnered by the African Paraphrases and to the ceaseless barrage of comments and criticisms often based on misunderstanding of these early works. The extreme, external pressure of fame and critical commentary has played a significant role in sparking and affecting Volans’ remarks which with respect to *She Who Sleeps* are quite exaggerated and often far from the truth. The African Paraphrase pieces gave Volans international recognition very early in his career leaving him to carry a heavy encumbrance for the rest of his professional life. Christopher Fox writes that “the popularity of his [Volans’] African music had become something of a burden.”\(^{134}\) One can only imagine the difficulty of trying to grow as an artist while constantly managing the increased scrutiny of one’s early works. Volans is rebelling against the oppressive commentary that is subsequent to international fame and recognition. Volans’ shifted aesthetics and stream of contradictory comments are his way of desperately trying to escape the attention-grabbing black hole that his African Paraphrase works have become in an attempt to allow his new work to stand by itself and to not be overshadowed; the African Paraphrases are his albatross which he is trying to shed. As I see it, Volans’ utterances are motivated and affected by the toils of fame, and thus, cannot be comprehended in a completely literal sense as they are frequently exaggerated and/or purposefully manipulated in attempts to absolve himself of his early works. Given this

\(^{134}\) Fox, “Where the river bends,” 40.
purposeful manipulation and exaggeration of utterances, Taylor’s “extra-musical”
accusation of cultural appropriation that is based primarily on Volans’ shifted aesthetics
becomes less than tenable and should not be considered when evaluating Volans’
treatment of African music in his African Paraphrases. Volans’ shifted viewpoints also
continue to lose credence when it is realized that much of his work after his aesthetic shift
concerns many of the same compositional preoccupations that were initially inspired by
his experience with African music and that he began to explore with his African
Paraphrases. With this understanding, it becomes necessary to view the African
Paraphrases with their initial intent.

“A Consistency of Artistic Purpose”

Since his aesthetic shift, Volans has continued to compose music that builds on
many of the African musical qualities that he began exploring and incorporating in his
early African Paraphrase works. Gilmore believes that Volans’ initial interest in
“overcoming form” that began with his study of African music in the late 1970s has now
become an “obsession.” This formlessness, discussed earlier in the comparison
between She Who Sleeps and White Man Sleeps, is exemplified when Volans writes a
series of repeated sections with varying number of intended repetitions to elicit the
formal asymmetries akin to that of African music and art. With just a cursory look at his
post-aesthetic-shift percussion pieces Akrodha (1998) and Chakra (2003), this
compositional technique is utilized extensively. Gilmore further comments how


several of Volans’ later string quartets share the same open-ended formal quality as that of *Matepe*, a direct emulation of African mbira music.\(^{137}\) In Volans’ *String Quartet No. 6* composed in 2006, Fox likens the formal and textural results that are formed when “two chords are exchanged between a live string quartet and its pre-recorded double for twenty five minutes” to the direct African influences emulated in *White Man Sleeps*.\(^{138}\) There are more than just formal similarities observed between Volans’ early and later music. Gilmore describes how Volans’ *Cicada* (1994) utilizes similar interlocking rhythmic patterns to *Matepe* that are also inspired by African mbira music.\(^{139}\) This list of comparisons illustrating the continuation of African-inspired musical techniques and aesthetics in Volans’ later music does not stop here. Although in these more recent works, the techniques and aesthetics may seem quite far-removed from Africa and are treated by Volans with a much greater sense of abstraction, their direct African influence is unmistakable, and their origins all indubitably trace back to his earliest African Paraphrase works in one way or another.

Volans’ current and seemingly purposeful obscuration of the African elements found in his African Paraphrases creates an evolutionary disconnect. Volans’ affected utterances cause his post-aesthetic-shift works that reflect African elements reminiscent of the African Paraphrases to be discerned in a way that conceals their true influences and artistic basis. To resolve this evolutionary disconnect, the heritage underlying Volans’ post-aesthetic-shift works needs to be unmasked linking them to the earlier African Paraphrase pieces. Fox comments on the evolution of Volans’ music arguing that Volans


\(^{138}\) Fox, “Where the river bends,” 40.

\(^{139}\) Gilmore, “Wild Air,” 27.
and the other Cologne School composers “had established a changed relationship with musical content many years earlier” and that their later works “share the same compositional preoccupations as those earlier Cologne School works.” It is this “consistency of artistic purpose” Fox asserts that connects the early and later work of the Cologne School composers, especially that of Volans, regardless of the reactive, contradictory discourse with which he clouds his early work. To uncover this “consistency of artistic purpose” connecting Volans’ early and later works, there is a need to look beyond Volans’, of what now appears to be, affected commentary and to continue to accept the African Paraphrases based on their original, initial intent.

Superficially, Volans may be justified in saying that his African Paraphrase pieces are obsolete because of the now historicized “social and political considerations that played a large role in the composition of these works in the first place,” Taylor writes. As Volans told Gilmore, “the moment for that kind of work has passed, along with the apartheid state.” With this more recent commentary that stems from his aesthetic shift, Volans seems to be trying to augment the political relevance of the African Paraphrases, making it appear as though the works were only written for political reasons. I believe that by declaring the historical obsolescence of the African Paraphrases in present day, Volans is able to rid himself of these ‘burdensome’ works. Recall, however, that at the time of their composition, Volans did not explicitly iterate the socio-political intentions of the African Paraphrases. Rather, these intentions were ancillary considerations to his

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140 Fox, “Where the river bends,” 40.
141 Fox, “Where the river bends,” 40.
142 Taylor, “When We Think,” 518.
artistic intentions, his call for new music. As discussed in Chapter 2, this call for new music, with Volans as principal architect, became the Cologne School’s postmodernism (now considered part of the “New Simplicity” movement). Throughout Volans’ career, the “artistic purpose” that appears consistently, creating both the early African Paraphrases and his post-aesthetic-shift works, is an emanation of the Cologne School’s new music. Volans’ African Paraphrases still need to be interpreted today in light of their original purpose, to present a confirming presentation of the Cologne School’s new music.

Conclusion: The Quintessential African Paraphrase

In 1977, Volans realized the Cologne School’s new music as he presented a “system of classification...standards and formulas.”¹⁴⁴ With this system, Volans codified several elemental qualifications required to fulfill what he coined as “the ‘official’ definition of ‘New Music’”: Volans advocated “a music that is ‘a-historical’ and ‘local’...of ‘here and now’, a music that is personal...organic and vigorous.”¹⁴⁵ Prior discussions have cast doubt on Taylor’s claims of cultural appropriation with respect to She Who Sleeps, on Volans’ attempts to dissociate She Who Sleeps from African drumming and African music with his aesthetical shift, and on Volans’ recent commentary promoting the historical obsolescence of the African Paraphrases, thereby, reinforcing the need to continue to view the African Paraphrases as manifestations of the Cologne School’s new music. It is also important to assess how completely Volans’

¹⁴⁴ Fox, “Where the river bends,” 32.

¹⁴⁵ Fox, “Where the river bends,” 32.
Paraphrases have actually realized the Cologne School's compositional agenda. This brief, yet revealing, assessment will finally and decisively advance *She Who Sleeps* as the quintessential African Paraphrase.

In his discussion of Volans, Fox conducts this assessment and presents the relatively harsh outcome in a straightforward, unmitigated manner. To manage this evaluation, Fox references *White Man Sleeps*. He writes:

> The music is undoubtedly 'organic and vigorous—its vigour has sold many thousands of CDs—and it is 'a-historical' and 'local' in the sense that for the vast majority of its listeners its African source material has no historical context and yet has very audible connections with a specific geographic location. That *White Man Sleeps* might be claimed as 'personal' is more problematic. Volans has been criticised for appropriating and profiting from the music of African musicians.146

Fox's assessment can be generalized and can act as an apt description for any of Volans' African Paraphrases. Hours of intense listening, study, and analysis are not needed to comprehend Volans' distinctive compositional voice and the unmistakable sound of his African Paraphrase works. South African music critic Max Loppert describes the African Paraphrases as a “distinctive musical idiom.”147 This distinctive, collective sound results from the compositional techniques used to create the Paraphrases. The quotation and paraphrase techniques that form the compositional basis of Volans' African Paraphrases have in the end, despite the brilliantly intriguing music Volans created using such techniques, stimulated a barrage of generally unresolved accusations all claiming some sense of cultural appropriation (as seen in the criticism of Bräuninger and Walton). These claims preclude the African Paraphrases from being labeled 'personal,' and in this

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sense, these works fall short in fully upholding the Cologne School’s prescription for new music. However, in spite of this outcome, there is still one African Paraphrase piece that does not falter when faced with this adversity, *She Who Sleeps*.

Given the similarities in Volans’ treatment of the African elements in *She Who Sleeps* to that of the other African Paraphrases, *She Who Sleeps* is indubitably positioned with the rest of the African Paraphrases, and by this positioning, is imbued with Volans’ artistic intentions that were informed by the ideals of the Cologne School. However, it is ultimately with the work’s manifestation of the inherent implications in the modern Western percussion idiom that the claims of cultural appropriation, that blemish the other Paraphrases and thereby leave the Cologne School’s prescription for new music unfulfilled, are surpassed. *She Who Sleeps* is an unscathed portrayal of the Cologne School’s new music. Furthermore, given the “consistency of artistic purpose” that is displayed by Volans’ continued preoccupation with the same compositional ideals that were initially inspired by the Cologne School’s new music and explored in the African Paraphrases, *She Who Sleeps* can be considered the only unbroken link between his early (African Paraphrase) works and his later (post-aesthetic-shift) works. The relationship between *She Who Sleeps* and Volans’ later works is further strengthened when the greater sense of abstraction of African musical qualities found in *She Who Sleeps*, as compared to other Paraphrases, is viewed as a direct precursor to the even greater abstraction with which Volans treats these qualities in his later works. At the outset of this paper, initially appearing to be a misunderstood and seemingly inconsequential work, *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* can now be seen as the pinnacle of Kevin Volans’ African Paraphrase works; it is his quintessential African Paraphrase.
To Gilmore, Volans remarked, “In composing and in life in general there’s only one subject worth pursuing, and that is freedom. Freedom not only from other people’s restrictions but freedom from your own baggage. It always involves overcoming.”

She Who Sleeps is an embodiment of such freedom. This work embodies the freedom that the other African Paraphrases tried to achieve but failed to wholly attain, overcoming the uncompromising modernism of Stockhausen. Its exoneration from claims of cultural appropriation that afflict the other Paraphrases frees She Who Sleeps from Volans’ artistic “baggage.” Ultimately, She Who Sleeps manifests the musical freedom fundamental to the Cologne School’s new music, thus, providing a foundation for the evolution of Volans’ work (a continuation of the Cologne School’s new music). Exemplifying John Cage’s dictum, “Percussion music is revolution,” She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket is a testament to Volans’ perpetual desire to overcome or engender revolution; it is this desire that has and continues to motivate Volans’ life and work.

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APPENDIX A

Kevin Volans: List of Works and Instrumentation\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{149} Compiled from the “Works” section of Volans’ website: http://www.kevinvolans.com/index.php?id=9. All the published works are published by Chester Music Ltd., London.
ORCHESTRA:
One Hundred Frames (1991)
Concerto for Double Orchestra (2001)
Symphony: Daar Kom die Alibama (2010), chamber orchestra

SOLOIST(S) PLUS ORCHESTRA:
Concerto for Piano and Winds (1995)
Cello Concerto (1997)
Trio Concerto (2005), pf., vl., vc., orch.
Piano Concerto no. 2 "Atlantic Crossing" (2006)

DRAMATIC:
Correspondences (1990), dance opera
The Man With Footsoles of Wind (1988-1993), chamber opera
Zeno at 4 am (2000-2001), theatre piece
Confessions of Zeno (2002), theatre piece

LARGE CHAMBER ENSEMBLE:
Chevron (1990)
Kneeling Dance (1992), 6 pf
L'isle Joyeuse (Debussy) (arr. 1995)
Double Violin Concerto (1999)

WIND ENSEMBLE:
This Is How It Is (arr. 1995)

SMALL CHAMBER ENSEMBLE:
Matepe (1980), 2 hrpsd. and perc.
Walking Song (1984), fl., hrpsd., perc.
Leaping Dance (1984), 2 pf.
Kneeling Dance (1984), 2 pf.
Wanting to Tell Stories (1993), pf., cl., va., cb.
String Quartet No. 5 – Dancers on a Plane (1993), 2 vl., va., vc.
Cicada (1994), 2 pf.
String Quartet No. 6 (2000), 2 vl., va., vc.

SMALL CHAMBER ENSEMBLE (cont.):
String Quartet No. 7 (2002), 2 vl., va., vc.
Chakra (2003), 3 perc.
Desert Steps (2003), va., vc., 2 gtr.
4 Guitars (2003), 4 gtr.
String Quartet No. 9 – Shiva Dances (2004), 2 vl., va., vc.
String Quartet No. 10 (2006), 2 vl., va., vc.
viola:piano (2008), va., pf.
Trumpet, Vibe, Cello, Piano (2009), trp., vb., vc., pf.
Piano Trio No. 2 (2009), pf., vl., vc.
No Translation: Six Sketches after Juan Uslé (2009), 2 vl., 2 va., 2 vc., 3 perc.

SOLO INSTRUMENTAL:
She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket (1985), perc.
Striding Dance (1992), pf.
Untitled (1996), pf. and wind ensemble
March (1996), pf.
Asanga (1997), perc.
3 rhythmic etudes (2003), pf.
3 structural etudes (2003), pf.
passi leggieri (2003), Hardanger fiddle
Double Take (2004), cl. with accompaniment (unspecific)

MUSIC FOR DANCE:
Duets (1995) [with co-composer Matteo Fargion], tape
5:4 (1996), perc. and tape
Things I Don’t Know (1997-1998), tape
Wild Air (1998)
Surface (1999) [with Juergen Simpson, electronics], hrpsd. and tape

ELETRONIC MUSIC:
Studies in Zulu History (1977-1979), tape
Kwazulu Summer Landscape (1979), tape
Cover Him With Grass (1982), tape

CHORAL MUSIC:
One Day Fine (1994)
Canciones del alma (2009)

WORKS FOR TELEVISION:
Plane-Song (1994), 2 vl., va., vc., tape

UNPUBLISHED WORK:
2 Songs (1970), sop. and pf.
Grafik indeterminate length (1971), graphic score
Module indeterminate length (1973), graphic score with instructions
Delay in Glass (1979), 2 singers, Irish harp, 2 pf., tape
Mbira (1980), 2 hrpsd.
Journal (Walking Song) (1964), chamber ensemble
APPENDIX B

Kevin Volans: *White Man Sleeps*, I, mm. 1-3¹⁵⁰

For the Kronos Quartet

STRING QUARTET No.1

White Man Sleeps

Kevin Volans

FIRST DANCE

* Section A is played four times. The variant endings a, b and c may be used at any point and in any order, this to be decided in advance by the players.

* Section C is played twice. Variant endings may be chosen in advance, as before.

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APPENDIX C

Kevin Volans: *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket*, mm. 1-68\(^{151}\)

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\(^{151}\) Volans, *She Who Sleeps*, 1.
She Who Sleeps With A Small Blanket
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