

Two South Indian-American Rudimental Solos



By Malcolm Lim

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I would like to dedicate this collection to

My teacher: Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. Trichy Sankaran,

My parents: Christopher, Beatrice (in memoriam),

And

My wife: Barbara.

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Preface

“What would happen if we used the rhythmic principles and form of South Indian Karnatak drumming to create a contemporary rudimental solo?”

This was the question that has opened up creative possibilities for me. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, I began to wonder if there was an under-represented perspective I could contribute to the percussion world that would be a reflection of my own musical journey over the years. Within a few days, a light bulb came on.

I was curious about using a Karnatak rhythmic framework within which I could be free to explore a more personal style of snare drumming. At the same time, I had been exploring Bob Becker’s study of pattern and rhythm, which provided a way to systematically build motifs and variations. Both approaches seemed to treat rhythm in a more “additive” or linear way, emphasizing asymmetrical groupings of subdivisions and therefore complemented each other well. I felt the South Indian principles and form could provide the overall structure of the solos and Becker’s material could provide the appropriate rudimental language and a creative process for developing musical ideas. In the end elements of South Indian form and Western form fused to some extent. Finding an appropriate balance between form and fluidity was and continues to be a fascinating exploration.

An important seed had already been planted at the *Simon Fraser University World Percussion Intensive* organized by Sal Ferreras, class of 1994. It was at this course that I first met Sal Ferreras, Trichy Sankaran, and Glen Velez, who all widened musical horizons for many of us classically trained western percussionists. I was later fortunate to study privately with Glen Velez and Trichy Sankaran. It was Sankaran who taught me many of the South Indian principles and phrases used in this collection.

One other important piece of the mix fell into place when I participated in the inaugural Josh Jones “Redefining Technique” seminar in the summer of 2020, which gave me more confidence to adopt a multi-timbral approach to writing for snare drum. I was curious to if it was possible to capture the flavor of Karnatak multi-tonal percussion instruments on a single snare drum membrane, without having to use rim shots, strokes on the rim or shell, different types of sticks or brushes, or different zones on the snare head. I enjoy the old school simplicity and challenge of writing for a drum pad and two sticks. Only time will tell if I this approach has been successful.

Finally, with the understanding that the histories that bind cultures and groups together have often privileged some at the expense of others, I would like to express

my hope that this project builds bridges instead of reinforcing walls. I have sought to be careful in my citation of sources and to be respectful to South Indian classical form within the context of what I'm trying to do. I hope that I could do justice to the form, one steeped in deep tradition, but I believe I can only have fallen short.

Thanks to you the reader for going on this journey with me.

Malcolm Lim, June 2020

Forward

As drummers we are often viewed or asked to be timekeepers. This "limitation" while true, dumbs down the art that is within time. Rhythmic integrity and accuracy is always encouraged, but only gives you a surface level relationship to time. So the question is, how do we as not only drummers but musicians deepen that relationship? I think something that Malcolm and I always agreed on was that music is an expressive language, and when we dissect the variables that make up music, that should not make the individual elements unexpressive. Finding ways to maintain and or discover the many expressive attributes of these elements will enhance the music and encourage even more musicality.

By expanding your "vocabulary" in regards to time and rhythm, you give yourself way more options and approaches to different rhythmic situations. From phrasing to the spaces between notes, your increased awareness of and access to the possibilities not only gives you more comfort and ease playing in time, but also creative license to play with time. Slightly crushing rhythms to sound more antsy or as if time is pushing forward, or slightly widening rhythms to sound more lackadaisical, these options and more are available to you. This book not only introduces you to and helps you explore another culture's relationship to rhythm, but puts it in a context that you are familiar with. It's this fusion that excites me and it gives me joy to not only play through these solos, but to challenge myself in actually playing the solos utilizing the vocabulary given to me and not translate it to fit my "native language."

I've always admired Malcolm's musical honesty and drive to continue to not only expand his technique but to deepen his musical expression through that technique, and that dedication is definitely present within this book. This type of honor to the craft is also not lost on the respect given to the source material. Acknowledging the inspiration behind these solos is something I know Malcolm specifically wanted to ensure was made clear, and I greatly admire and appreciate that. I sincerely hope that you enjoy this book as much as I do.

Josh Jones

Principal Percussion, Kansas City Symphony

Former Principal Percussion, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra

Introduction

I have drawn from several drumming traditions for these solos, but the main sources of inspiration are South Indian (S. Indian) drumming and modern American rudimental drumming. In particular I have drawn from the work of Professor Trichy Sankaran and Bob Becker. I have referenced lesson material with Sankaran, his recordings, and his book, “The Rhythmic Principles and Practice of South Indian Drumming” (Sankaran, 1994); in some cases, I have embellished the original material to suit the rudimental drumming style. In addition, I have extensively used concepts from Bob Becker’s book, “Rudimental Arithmetic” (Becker, 2009), to build rhythmic motifs and find a language specific to the snare drum. When inspired, I have introduced other influences as well, such as idioms from French rudimental drumming (Tompkins, 2007, 2011; Lefevre, 1979) and Brazilian *escola de samba* (Goncalves and Costa, 2000).

I would like to emphasize that these solos are not meant to replicate Karnatak drum solos, although certain aspects may be quoted; rather these solos use a hybrid structure incorporating Western and Karnatak form and leave me free to develop motifs and phrases within this framework. These are creative explorations that draw from and celebrate the spirit of Karnatak, American, and other drumming traditions.

This introduction includes an examination of the structure of a traditional Karnatak drum solo; a breakdown of the hybrid South Indian – American form; an explanation of the cadential formulas used (*mora, long mora, korvai*); guidelines for learning and performing the solos with sections on the drum syllables (*solkattu*), sticking, bass drum accompaniment, accents and articulations, note beaming, and phrasing; and finally a description of individual solos themselves.

Structure of a South Indian Drum Solo

Many scholars consider India’s classical rhythmic system (North and South) to be the most highly developed in the world, with its breadth of *tala* structures (rhythmic cycles) and systematic approach (Sankaran, 1994, p. 14). The main percussion instrument of southern Karnatak music is called *mrdangam*, which is a double-headed barrel shaped drum. (The instrument that I studied was the lizard skin tambourine called the *kanjira*.) The *tani avartanam* (*mrdangam* or other percussion solo) is the highlight of a South Indian concert. A *mrdangam* solo usually takes 15 to 20 minutes (Sankaran, 1994, p. 142). While there is no prescribed solo form to follow, a norm has been set by past drummers.

The basic structure of the *mrdangam* solo involves “an introductory stage, a middle stage, a stage involving change of pace, and a final stage” (Sankaran, 1994, p. 142). Each successive stage generally involves a higher intensity or density of rhythm. Rhythmic motifs are introduced at the beginning of each section and then

developed. Often a section uses the structure of longer to shorter phrases in order to build momentum, called *gopucca yati* (cow's tail shape). Motivic material is often used to create cadential (closing) formulas - *korvais* and *moras*.

At some point comes a change in pace or underlying pulse, usually transitioning from even subdivisions (*chatusra nadai*) to triplet (*tisra nadai*), quintuplet (*kanda nadai*), or septuplet (*misra nadai*) subdivisions; this is called a *nadai* change (*nadai bedam*). There may even be several changes of underlying pulse, each followed by a return to the original pulse subdivisions.

Following two or three *nadai* changes is the final section called *pharan*, which consists of very fast notes leading to the *long mora* (*periya mora*). This *long mora* is standardized for each *tala* and more complex than a normal *mora*. A *korvai* repeated three times follows the *long mora* (Sankaran, 1994, p. 143). In the context of a concert, the other musicians enter as soon as this *korvai* is completed. In Sankaran's drum solos, the *long mora* is always present even when other musicians are not involved. Often a short closing section ensues, which I call a *coda*.

Structure of a Hybrid South Indian - American Drum Solo

In these solos, I have incorporated aspects of a classical Western form called *rondo*, in which a principal theme (called a *refrain*) alternates with contrasting themes called episodes. I wanted a musical thread that unified the entire composition. Thus, the *refrain* resurfaces in the original dynamic and underlying pulse after each *nadai* change. In traditional Karnatak solos, it is my understanding that there is no refrain because the introductory ideas are often used to outline the *tala*; early themes are paced slower than later ones. In this way, what we end up with is a hybrid *South Indian – American* form for the solos.

Hybrid S. Indian – American Drum Solo Form:

- Principal Theme (Refrain)
- *Nadai* Change # 1 (change of underlying pulse, e.g. triplet subdivision)
- Refrain (restatement of principal theme and return to original *nadai* or pulse)
- *Nadai* Change # 2 (change of underlying pulse, e.g. quintuplet or septuplet subdivision)
- Refrain
- *Pharan* (final stage; very fast patterns)
- Long *Mora* (*Periya Mora*)
- Final *Korvai* (repeated three times)
- Coda

The rudimental solos presented here follow this structure; in the body of the music I have labeled the main sections, as well as the *korvais*, *moras*, and *long moras*.

South Indian Cadential Formulas: Moras, Long Moras, and Korvais

Three kinds of S. Indian cadential (closing) structures are used in these solos: *moras*, *long moras*, and *korvais* (Sankaran, 1994, pp. 58 - 64).

1. A *mora* involves three repetitions of a phrase ending on *sam*, the first note of the *tala* cycle (e.g. Solo I, m. 8). There can also be pauses between the phrases (e.g. Solo I, m. 108) and even *sub moras* (e.g. Solo I, m. 120). *Moras* usually have unitary form – they are not repeated. Rhythms are written in *solkattu* (drum syllables).

Examples of a Mora Structure:

Ex. 1

Phrase
Phrase
Phrase
// “Sam” (the beginning of the next measure, or focal point)

ta di gi na tom
ta di gi na tom
ta di gi na tom
// ta

Ex. 2

Phrase (pause)
Phrase (pause)
Phrase
// “Sam”

ta ka jo nu tom (pause)
ta ka jo nu tom (pause)
ta ka jo nu
// tom

2. The *long moras* (“*periya mora*”) are standardized formulations in each *tala* and occur at the end of the drum solo. After the *long mora*, a *korvai* is played three times; the other musicians enter at the end of this final *korvai*. The structure of the *long mora* in *adi tala* can be written out in the following manner (Sankaran, 1994, p. 61).

Structure of Adi Tala Long Mora in 6 parts:
(A – 2 counts, B – 2 counts, C – 1 count)

A B
A CC
(8 counts)

A B
A CC
(8 counts)

A B
A C
(7 counts)

A C
(3 counts)

A
(2 counts)

Sub Mora
CC
CC
CC
(4 counts; this sub mora is always double in length to the CC part in the first section)

Total: 32 counts

There is an excellent YouTube video explaining and demonstrating the form of *Karnatak* long moras in several *talas* (eAmbalam SaMaaGaMa, 2014). The next two pages show the *long moras* and their internal structure for *Adi tala* and *Khanda Eka tala*. The structural indications are not included in the main body of the solos.

S. Indian Talas and Bass Drum/Hi Hat Accompaniment

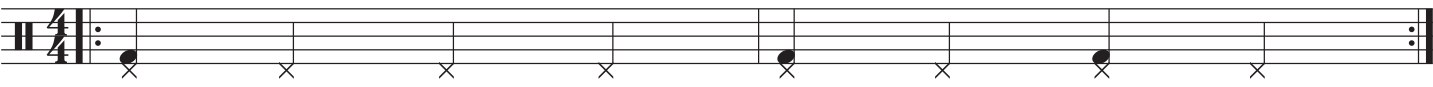
Bass Drum and Hi Hat Accompaniment

Performers should play the bass drum and hi hat "chick" pattern for each specific *tala*.
Traditional hand gestures are provided for reference.

Hand Gestures

- X = Clap
- O = Wave (back of the hand)
- I = Finger Count

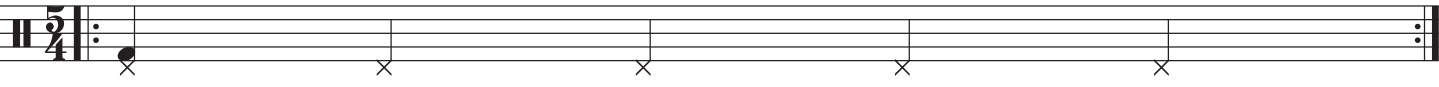
Adi Tala



X I(5) I(4) I(3) X O X O

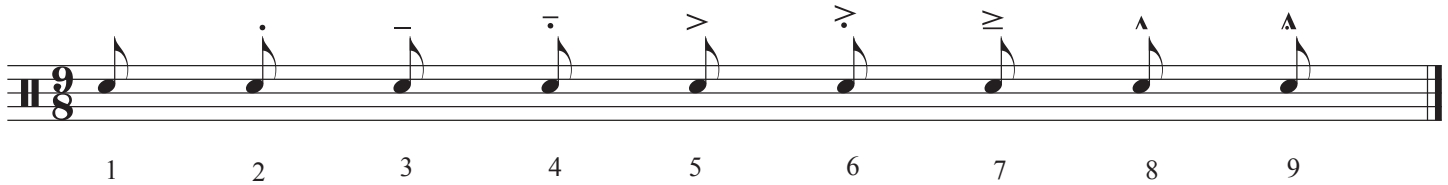
Khanda Eka Tala

3



X I(5) I(4) I(3) I(2)

Legend of Accents and Articulations



There are multiple ways to achieve the same tonal result. In general a fulcrum closer to the front of the hand, more lift in the stroke, and use of the wrist will emphasize higher overtones (i.e. more articulate or bright). A fulcrum closer to the back of the hand, less lift in the stroke, and use of the arm will emphasize lower overtones (i.e. rounder or dark). Weight can be added to any of these articulations using a longer "pathway of connection" (e.g. awareness of chest or tailbone linking these areas on the body to the wrist and stick). For more information, see Josh Jones' *Spatial Studies for Hitting Things Book 1* (Jones, 2018).

Here are some examples:

1. Regular note: full sound (e.g. wrist full stroke, middle fulcrum)
2. Staccato: shorter than full stroke, brighter in tone (e.g. wrist upstroke, front or middle fulcrum)
3. Tenuto accent: an accent with a darker tone, but not as loud as a regular accent (e.g. arm downstroke, middle fulcrum); in certain contexts it could also mean simply a medium accent
4. Staccato-tenuto accent: staccato with a slightly rounder sound (e.g. wrist upstroke; back fulcrum)
5. Regular accent: full sound (e.g. wrist full or down stroke, middle fulcrum)
6. Accented staccato: as loud as an accented stroke, but more staccato and brighter in tone (e.g. wrist upstroke, front or middle fulcrum)
7. Accented tenuto: as loud as an accented note but with rounder, darker tone (e.g. arm downstroke, back fulcrum)
8. Marcato accent: in this legend, an aggressive short accent louder than all previous accents (e.g. wrist full, up, or down stroke; middle fulcrum)
9. Staccato-marcato accent: same as marcato accent, but even shorter (e.g. wrist upstroke, middle fulcrum)

Descriptions of the Solos

I – Adi Tala (4/4 or 8/4)

The principal theme of this solo is based on the three *permutations* (an ordered arrangement of the elements in a set) of 3 – 3 – 2, a common rhythmic motif around the world. The permutations are: 3 – 3 – 2, 3 – 2 – 3, and 2 – 3 – 3 (Becker, 2009, p. 63). These relationships can be expressed as 16th notes (e.g. m. 1), 8th notes (e.g. m. 6), or quarter notes (e.g. mm. 3-4). The groove pattern in m. 1 is inspired by the *escola de samba* snare patterns of Rio de Janeiro (Goncalves and Costa, 2000, p. 22-23). The figure in m. 22 is based on the polyrhythm 5:3 with 4 stroke ruffs inserted (Becker, 2009, p. 91). The Sankaran *korvai* in mm. 24 – 26, is repeated in triplet subdivision, then in sextuplet subdivision. The *nadai* shift in mm. 26 – 27 is immediate.

Nadai Change #1 (m. 33) superimposes a rhythmic cell of four 8th notes over the 12/8 dotted quarter beat, creating a 3:4 polyrhythmic effect. I used French sextuplets and septuplets (mm. 35 – 44) played against the beat. This section in 12/8 is organized in a rhythmic pattern called a *yati*; in this case it is *gopucca yati* (shape of a cow's tail), meaning decreasing phrase lengths. Thus the section begins with phrases of four bars (mm. 33 - 40), followed by phrases of two bars (mm. 41 – 44), followed by phrases of a single bar (mm. 45 – 46). The Sankaran *korvai* in mm. 47 - 54 then uses the motif found throughout the preceding section (Shorely, 2011). The *korvai* theme uses *srotovaha yati* (meaning “river”), in which successive phrases increase in length. *Nadai* Change #2 uses a quintuplet subdivision; notice how the change is gradually introduced as part of the *refrain* (Shorely, 2011). I have tried to capture the highs and lows of the *kanjira* by using staccato and tenuto markings.

The *pharan* section starts in m. 95. Note that cells of seven are played consecutively starting on beat 3 of m. 99; in 4/4 time groups of seven notes fit nicely to create long phrases. It is not usual in *pharan* sections to use such cross patterns – this is more characteristic of another South Indian form called a *koraippu*, however I wanted to have fun. The *long mora* begins in m. 103. Note that the third repetition of the *korvai* (m. 113 – 114) reverses the flow from short to long phrases (*srotovaha yati*). I used a *nadai* change into triplet subdivision – this is one of my favorite endings. The coda uses a French combination of triplets and quintuplets, but with Becker sticking.

II – Khanda Eka Tala (5/4)

The principal theme is based on the sequence 2+3+4+5+6 (Becker, 2009, p. 120). Measure 4 is based on a reversal of the theme: 6+5+4+3+2 (*retrograde*). Measures 7 – 8 incorporate the principal theme in expanded form (*augmentation*) – the theme takes twice as long. The Sankaran *korvais* in mm. 32 - 40 and mm. 51 – 54 are from the *Laya Vinyas* recording (Sankaran, 1994).

The motif of *Nadai* Change #1, the 15/8 section (mm. 41 – 50), uses the prime numbers 3, 5, and 7 (in the permutation of 7, 3, 5) (Becker, 2009, p. 70). I have tried to emulate the highs and lows of the *kanjira* once more by using staccatos and tenutos. In mm. 49 and 50 the rhythmic motif doubles in speed.

Several sections use the *gopucca yati* structure of long to short phrases (e.g. mm. 9 – 16, mm. 21 – 26, and mm. 41 - 48). *Nadai* Change #2 (septuplet subdivision) is based on a section of a *kanjira* solo in the *Laya Vinyas* recording (Sankaran, 1994). I call the rudiment for a figure of 7 (RLRLLLL) a “paradiddlediddlele”; I found this sticking best represented the figure I heard on the recording and would provide an interesting variation on the “paradiddlediddle”. It is fine if the triple stroke LLL is slightly phrased so that the notes taper.

The *pharan* section involves repeated cells of nine (starting in m. 73); in 5/4 time, groupings of nine notes fit nicely to create long phrases. Again this cross pattern is not common in *pharan* sections. The *long mora* is based on a transcription from *Laya Vinyas* (Sankaran, 1994). The final Sankaran *korvai* (Shorley, 2011) is an interesting composition in itself; the theme in m. 83 (ta . di . ta ka jo nu) is repeated twice as fast (*diminution*). Then phrases get shorter using *gopuccha yati*, followed by a *mora*.

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Youtube Video

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-URCWw2Aqs&t=801s>

I. - Adi Tala

giocosu ♩ = 85 - 88

PRINCIPAL THEMES
(permutations of 3+3+2)

Malcolm Lim

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in 4/4 time. It consists of 13 measures, each with a corresponding drum pattern (R for right, L for left) and dynamic markings. The score is divided into sections by measure numbers 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13. The lyrics are in Italian and are placed below the drum patterns in measures 7, 9, and 11. The dynamics range from *f* (forte) to *p* (piano), with *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano) also used. The tempo is marked *giocosu* with a quarter note equal to 85-88 beats per minute. The key signature is one flat (B-flat).

Measure 1: *f* *mf*

Measure 3: *mp*

Measure 5: *f* *mf* *mf p*

Measure 7: *f* *mp* *f* *p*

Measure 9: *f* *mf* *poco*

Measure 11: *p*

Measure 13: *f* *mf* *mp* *mf*

Lyrics: *ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom*

I

15 *sfz p* *ff* *p*

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

17 *f* *mp*

R L R L R L R L L R~ L R~ R L R L R L L R L R R L R R L R L R R L R R L

19 *f* *p*

R L L R R L L R L L R R L R~ L R~ R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

21 *f* *p* *mp* *p*

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

23 *f sub. p* *f* *poco* *sim.*

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

ta ki ta ta ki ta ta ka ta ki ta tom ta ki ta

25 *f* *sub. p*

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

ta ka ta ki ta tom ta ka ta ki ta tom tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom

L'istesso tempo (♩=♩.)

27 *f*

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

ta ki ta ta ki ta ta ka ta ki ta tom ta ki ta tom ta ka ta ki ta tom ta

29 *f* *sub. p*

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

ka ta ki ta tom tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom

[illegible]

II. - Khanda Eka Tala

animato

♩ = 90 - 92

PRINCIPAL THEME
(2+3+4+5+6)

Malcolm Lim

1 *p* *pp*

3 *p* *mp*

5 *p* *pp*

7 *p* *crescendo*

9 *f sub. mf* *f*

11 *mf* *sub. p* *f*

13 *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

ta di gi na tom ki ta ta ka tom ki ta tom

15 *mf* *sfp* (Mora) (continue sticking and syllables)

17 *ff* *mf*

19 *f* *mp*

21 *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *mp* (continue articulations)

23 *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *mp*

25 *mf* *f* *mp* *mf* *f* *mp*

27 (Mora) *f* *mf* *f* 3X

28 *ff* *mf*

II

(Refrain)

[illegible]

(Korvai)

32

R ta L di R gi R na L tom R ta L di R gi R na L tom R ta L di R gi

f *mf*


34

R na L tom

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

ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ki ta ta ka tom ki ta tom

f *mf*

36 

38 *f* *p* *mp* *mf*

40

The second system of the musical score for 'Renaissance' by The Lumineers. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked '40'. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics 'na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom' are written below the notes. There are three measures of rests, each marked with a '3' and a '6' above them, indicating a triplet of sixteenth notes. The system ends with a double bar line.

na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom ta di gi na tom

NADAI CHANGE #1

(triplet subdivision using
prime numbers 7 + 3 + 5)

L'istesso tempo (♩=♩.)

[illegible]

ABOUT THE COMPOSER



Malcolm Lim has worked as a freelance percussionist with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, the Red Deer Symphony Orchestra, and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. He teaches percussion at the Mount Royal University Conservatory of Music and is the current musical director of the Calysto Steelband. Malcolm has taught courses at the University of Lethbridge and led master classes at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He was the musical director for the Calgary Escola de Samba from 2002 to 2012 and has also worked as a creativity facilitator at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

Malcolm holds a Bachelor degree in Percussion Performance from McGill University where he studied with Pierre Beluse and D'Arcy Gray. His graduate studies were at University of Montreal where he worked with Louis Charbonneau of l'Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal. Malcolm has published in *Percussive Notes*, the Percussive Arts Society periodical. He has studied with Trichy Sankaran (S. Indian percussion), Glen Velez (frame drumming), Boca Rum (Afro-Brazilian percussion), and Michel Mirhige (Arabic percussion). He has received Canada Council for the Arts grants to study in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador da Bahia, Brazil.

You can find out more about Malcolm Lim at www.rhythm mastery.com