Thrice into Flames (2017)

for solo marimba, vibraphone and snare drum with backing track

Dave Maric · c. 10'30"

Thrice into Flames is the third in a sequence of works for mallet and untuned percussion written for David Mitchell. He led the consortium that commissioned it and gave the premiere at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in March 2017. Its two predecessors, *Trilogy* (2000) and *Sense & Innocence* (2002), are present here in some form, but their influence is distant and subverted. The clearest link is the backing track, which is built from David's own live recording of *Trilogy*. His part has been isolated and heavily fragmented until it is barely recognisable, like a ghost of the earlier piece running beneath the new one.

That fragmentation spills over into the live part, which can't help being caught up in the sequence of sharply contrasting events that drive the piece. The soloist moves between three instruments, each with its own character:

– a frenzied opening on snare drum
– marimba writing that swings between rapid, disjointed bursts and sudden silences
– stark, dry, mechanical patterns on vibraphone
– a freer marimba passage played with liberal rubato

Throughout, the performer is pulled between playing freely and locking onto the backing track. At first they follow its accelerations, then chase it towards 'as fast as possible'. In the final stretch they hold to it in strict tempo, as marimba and snare are thrown together in an increasingly frantic exchange.

The piece ends somewhere else entirely, with a simple, childlike chorale for vibraphone that never seems able to resolve.