

Percussion Writing in Jacob Druckman's Orchestral Music

By Dr. Nicholas Papador

If a percussionist is familiar with the music of Jacob Druckman (1928–1996), it may be exclusively with “Reflections on the Nature of Water,” one of our most established repertoire works for marimba. Contemporary chamber music aficionados will likely have knowledge of “Animus II” for mezzo-soprano, two percussionists, and tape; or “Bō” for marimba, harp, bass clarinet, and three voices. The latter composition was written for the composer’s son, Dan Druckman, percussionist with the New York Philharmonic.

Ironically, we are now in a time period where Jacob Druckman’s solo marimba work is his most often performed piece, though it was the success of his orchestral output that inspired visionary percussion artists to commission the work. The present time is ideal for us as a percussion community to investigate Druckman’s career and, in particular, assess his contributions to orchestral percussion section playing in addition to his solo and chamber percussion work.

William Moersch, Leigh Howard Stevens, and Gordon Stout commissioned “Reflections on the Nature of Water” (1986) with a National Endowment for the Arts Consortium Grant. At the time, Druckman was at the apex of his career as a composer, teacher, and musical curator. He had completed his Meet the Composer residency with the New York Philharmonic and had overseen the Horizons Festival, a high-profile event where Druckman is credited with coining the

term “New Romanticism” with regard to modern orchestral music that had the potential to better connect with audiences and performers.

Druckman’s career and training explored a myriad of pre-existing practices and current trends searching for a path forward aesthetically in his music. His schooling at Juilliard promoted composition in a Stravinsky-influenced Neo-Classicism and/or the exploration of serial techniques. Seeking to establish and expand his compositional voice, he began working in the electronic music medium, where he created a body of music for live performers and fixed audio including the *Animus* series. Druckman’s mature style developed when he began orchestrating gestures heard in an electronic music studio setting. In early 1972, Druckman would complete his first full orchestra work, “Windows,” which won the Pulitzer Prize. “Windows” contains the musical hallmarks that would define the remainder of Druckman’s output: dramatic orchestral flourishes, musical quotation, and refined use of aleatoric technique.

This article will present orchestral highlights in Druckman’s percussion writing that illuminates some of his techniques and innovations as well as providing a close reading of the opening of his 1979 orchestral work “Aureole” with emphasis on the treatment of percussion to establish structurally important pitches as well as coloristic intention.

THE PERCUSSION SECTION IN DRUCKMAN'S ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Glancing at nomenclature pages of Druckman’s orchestral works, one will notice that a standard orchestral percussion layout of battery (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, accessories, and keyboard percussion) would not be practical. It is clear that Druckman envisioned each player as a multi-percussionist who handles a variety of timbres that correspond to frequency ranges within the orchestra. Each performer typically handles one mallet instrument flanked with a variety of drums, metals, woods, and accessories. This is consistent in a majority of his orchestral works. In “Windows” there are three percussion parts; there is no tim-



Jacob Druckman. Photo by Vincent P. Onepo.

pani part, but player 2 performs timpani glissandi as well as rolls on an inverted suspended cymbal on the head of one timpano. Later scores would utilize similar percussion layouts but would include a dedicated timpani part (often specifying piccolo timpani entrances). This change would keep Druckman's works more compliant with American Federation of Musicians instrument doubling and orchestral contracting practices as well as avoid impractical instrument and mallet changes.

The percussion scoring of "Windows" includes some interesting sonic concepts that would continue to be employed in later works. Druckman seemed fond of gestures involving unpitched wood instruments but sought to obscure the pentatonic melodic shape of temple blocks, so he would utilize two sets of temple blocks or have a single set played alongside two or more woodblocks. Works like Joan Tower's chamber piano concerto "Black Topaz" (1976) would also employ multiple sets of temple blocks for this reason. Druckman uses temple blocks to create explosive gestures that interrupt and stop whatever musical activity is happening at the moment; they are his version of a sudden cadence and they occur in many of his orchestral works.

One particularly stunning example takes place at the end of his 1977 work "Chiaroscuro." Near the conclusion of the piece, the music reaches a point of simmering tension with sizzle cymbal, tuned gongs (including water gong), tam-tam, and glissandi gestures by muted trombones and low strings. From this texture emerges a magnificent chord for full orchestra built on F-sharp. The chord builds steadily in volume but is suddenly cut off by this temple block gesture, which ends the piece. Finally, in order to create a natural sense of decay to the temple block gestures, Druckman writes the first note as an accent and then follows with grace notes. This allows the player to create a kinetic explosive effect without being burdened with realizing an abstract polyrhythm that would sound less natural. Druckman would make this use of after-event grace

notes a primary compositional structure in "Reflections on the Nature of Water" and other chamber works.

Listen to the conclusion of "Chiaroscuro" here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7eFS1hSAq8>.

View the score of "Chiaroscuro" here: <https://www.boosey.com/cr/perusals/score?id=32240>.

[Note: a free account is required to view Boosey & Hawkes perusal scores.]

It should be noted that the use of DIY percussion instruments trailblazed by John Cage, Lou Harrison, and Harry Partch still sat in the periphery in many conservatory and academic settings. One wonders if American orchestral composers of this era would have used more customized wood instruments (purpleheart and padouk samatras) had there been more interactions of "downtown/experimental" and "uptown/academic" movements within the American contemporary music scene. In contemporary American music today, custom-built wood and metal instruments are common. One Cage/Harrison-esque addition to the score is a suspended spring coil (truck spring). Moreover, Druckman often asks that the coil also have small metal rings on it to create a sizzle effect. This rich, rustic metal sound has an almost ancient timbral quality that corresponds to the Early Music and mythological themes in Druckman's music.

"Windows" calls for a steel drum that is not played conventionally. The player moves the stick in a circular motion, letting it bounce across the notes to create a kaleidoscopic and quiet texture. The score also features entrances on musical saw in the percussion 1 part, some of which involve changing metered rhythms while controlling the pitch (rehearsal numbers 16 and 17).

One of the most novel effects that is used many of Druckman's orchestral scores is the use of a "mallet with flexible handle." While this could be interpreted as a rattan handled stick, the effect Druckman described is best executed with a Musser "two-step" fiberglass handled mallet. He describes the technique as

follows in the score: "[L]ay handle on head of drum with head of mallet protruding over edge of drum. Flip mallet head causing ricochet while moving mallet in or out to change relative pitch."

View a demonstration of this technique here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsfyfwgGNQU>.

Druckman was not the first composer to use this technique. Lukas Foss used a similarly described technique in his 1963 chamber work "Echoi," but Druckman uniquely made the sound part of his standard orchestral percussion palette. Later, the technique would be employed in Annea Lockwood's "Amazonia Dreaming" for snare drum and in John Bergamo's timpani solo "Tulumbaz." Some of this author's own compositions were inspired by Druckman's orchestral behaviorism, and this effect can be heard in "Copperline Breathing" and "Summons." In "Windows" this sound is performed by percussion 1 at rehearsal number 16 and by percussion 2 at rehearsal number 15. Its most prominent use in Druckman's works is in "Aureole," eight measures before the end of the piece. Druckman uses the technique on conga exclusively, which is probably the most sonically effective drum for the technique. Foss used bongos for this technique in his work, Lockwood employed the technique on snare drum, and Bergamo's usage of the sound is on timpani. This technique is most successful on congas and timpani, where there is no raised counterhoop to impede the ricochet of the mallet. The small head size of the bongos also has some limitations for sustain and timbre adjustments in performance.

Listen to an example of this technique in "Aureole" here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggBTi8cNWbE>.

Lastly, when performing in Druckman's orchestra, the percussionist must be aware of what musical role and/or genre to portray. While percussionists deal in rhythm and timekeeping, Druckman's grace-note or notated gestures are often a part of orchestral flourishes rather than concrete accompaniment or independent melodic lines. In "Windows," the mea-

tures preceding rehearsal letters 1 and 2 are large dramatic ensemble arpeggios/glissandi that immediately attract the listener's attention. The movement of the notes by means of instrumentation and polyrhythmic scoring sound neither consonant nor dissonant, but kinetic—as if the colors of the orchestra were spilled like paint to the floor.

Listen to this passage of “Windows” here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B054tovKtEM>.

View the score to “Windows” here: <https://www.boosey.com/cr/perusals/score?id=12139>.

Percussionists must also be aware of how to nuance their touch in dynamics when playing within Druckman's musical quotations. In “Windows,” key moments of the work feature snippets of original music in the style of the Renaissance, Classical, and Romantic eras. This form of sonic “time travel” would inform his “Prism” for orchestra as well as the concept for his Postmodern *Medea* opera, which was tragically unfinished at the time of his death. In these works, Druckman used his own music as time portals between pre-existing music by such composers as Cavalli, Charpentier, and Cherubini. It would be a valid performance practice question of whether instruments such as timpani should adopt Baroque or early Classical playing tone in alternation with modern technique to situate the time and place of the music itself.

“AUREOLE”: A CASE STUDY OF DRUCKMAN'S PERCUSSION SECTION

For the following comparative analysis, view the scores here:

Druckman's “Aureole”: <https://www.boosey.com/cr/perusals/score?id=1094>.

Leonard Bernstein's “Symphony No. 3 ‘Kaddish’”: <https://www.boosey.com/cr/perusals/score?id=36413>.

The analyzed passages can be heard here:

“Aureole”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V84EhcGVdZ8>.

“Symphony No. 3 ‘Kaddish’”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRfj8l9waHA>.

While “Windows” won the Pulitzer Prize and “Prism” most clearly defined Druckman's techniques and narrative trajectory, Druckman felt 1979's “Aureole” was among his strongest works and one that he had no interest in revising. The percussion section includes timpani and three percussionists. The timpanist uses largely conventional techniques but does use glissandi on the piccolo timpano as an audible structural feature of the music. The timpanist also utilizes double-stop rolls and plays with brushes.

Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic Symphony Society commissioned “Aureole,” Druckman's fifth work for full orchestra. Bernstein conducted the premiere with the New York Philharmonic on June 9, 1979 at Avery Fisher Hall. The following is from Druckman's program notes for the work:

There is a single line running throughout “Aureole,” a constant, but shifting, shimmering melody from which all music springs. The line accumulates a halo of echoes and refractions which at times spin off and assume a life of their own and at times return to the source. At the center of this this line is the “Kaddish-tune” from the “Third Symphony” of Leonard Bernstein for whom Aureole was written.

The word “aureole,” stemming from the Latin *aurum* (gold), refers to the circler of light or glory surrounding the head of any sanctified being; the gilt representation of this in early painting; the corona of the sun; a halo surrounding the image of a brilliant body as seen in a telescope; any radiance, or something resembling or likened to it.

This description gives us insight as to how Druckman approached a post-modern treatment of quotational materials and colorist orchestrational strategy for percussion instruments that differs from a traditional battery-and-timpani model. This case study can help percussionists understand their role in a contemporary music ensemble, not only in Druckman's orchestra, but in the music of contempo-

raries who both preceded and followed his musical contributions.

As discussed earlier, Druckman's percussion section consists of three multi-percussionists who each cover a keyboard instruments flanked with other instruments:

Percussion 1: vibraphone (no motor), small cymbal, sizzle cymbal, 2 wood-blocks, 2 temple blocks, conga, flexatone (not listed on nomenclature page), small gong (higher pitched tam-tam), and large tam-tam.

Percussion 2: marimba (4-octave), glockenspiel (not listed on nomenclature page), vibraslap (not listed on nomenclature page), large cymbal, 5 temple blocks, medium tam-tam.

Percussion 3: chimes, small cymbal, vibraslap, large cymbal, bongos, timbales, medium and large tom-tom, bass drum, small tam-tam.

We can see pretty clearly from the instrument list that Druckman wasn't looking to form a section that would keep time or provide the addition of unpitched rhythmic punctuations. He was looking for percussive analogues to the frequency range of the orchestra. Percussion 3's setup contains a wide range of drums, from bongos to bass drum, but the player doesn't generally play melodic figures. The player adds rhythmic material within the general range of the timbres being performed by the ensemble at any given musical moment. The same could be said for the cymbals of various sizes that are played by all three percussionists. Unlike hand cymbals or a snare drum, which punctuate and have their own solo voice in the orchestra, the drums and cymbals are often meant to blend with the given timbre and, in some cases, thicken and even obscure certain sonorities.

The keyboard percussion instruments also collectively cover a wide pitch range. Extended-range marimbas weren't commonplace at this time (and fitting a 5-octave marimba in a multi-percussion setup could be cumbersome), so pitches below C3 do not appear in the piece. The use of marimba in “Aureole” is not a case of

scoring for a more “exotic” sounding xylophone. The work opens with marimba playing a repeated dotted rhythm (not unlike the texture David Maslanka would later use in “A Child’s Garden of Dreams”) on A3. Druckman also uses the instrument to create “amplified pizzicato” effects: single accents on pitches from which string instruments fade in arco material. These punctuations from keyboard percussion instruments often draw the listener’s attention towards lines of orchestral interest, thus elevating percussion’s structural importance in the orchestral hierarchy.

As the program notes suggest, “Aureole” is an homage to Leonard Bernstein. Druckman has selected the opening of the “Symphony No. 3 ‘Kaddish’” as source material from which the musical activities of “Aureole” emerge. At rehearsal letter A in the Bernstein piece (after the opening narration over a choral drone), the first musical gesture contains the structural pitches A, B-flat, and G-flat. In the Bernstein work this first gesture is delivered by flutes, harp, and vibraphone, with an echoed sequence by the first violin. To fully analyze the Bernstein piece, one must categorize and separate a number of stylistic traits that evolve from section to section. It is a truly post-modern work that embraces pitch-set composition, the use of 12-tone rows (the string section at rehearsal letter C is comprised of 12-note sets with no repetitions in a Schoenbergian manner), and modal/tonal passages that reflect the secularly Judaic nature of the texts (penned by Bernstein).

The work’s text is a poetic yet unflinching indictment of God for permitting atrocities to take place on Earth. The symphony is dedicated to the memory of President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated just weeks after the symphony’s premiere. The text was eerily prophetic, and yet Bernstein was not specific about what events inspired it. Events of the Holocaust may have been the original subject matter, as later performances of the piece used a different testimonial text by Lawyer/Author and Holocaust survivor Samuel Pisar.

Returning to the opening passage of the “Kaddish” symphony, the pitch motive A, B-flat, and G-flat makes up a 019 set. The use of set theory analysis here is apt, as the motive reappears with the same interval content beginning on other pitches. The first three measures at letter A are reimagined by Druckman in measures 1–6 of “Aureole.” The harp plucks the opening A3, which is immediately picked up by the marimba with the fading dotted gesture described earlier.

As a side note, in addition to the similarity to the opening marimba gesture of Maslanka’s “A Child’s Garden of Dreams,” the notion of the marimba’s key surface being kinetically “bouncy” is an idea that re-emerges in other marimba repertoire, such as Osvaldo Golijov’s “Mariel” and Jordan Nobles’ “Kinetics,” among others.

Druckman explained that his use of this dotted rhythm was to mimic the spoken rhythm of the actual Hebrew Kaddish prayer with its rhythmic text, “Yit’gadal v’yit’kasash sh’mē raba, amen (“Magnified and sanctified be His great name, Amen”). The marimba is the primary voice from which Bernstein’s pitch set is resonated and elaborated by Druckman. The opening gesture plays alongside a clarinet executing a quarter-tone trill, creating a thickness to the unison. The clarinet sustains the tone as the marimba fades and then plays the next structural pitch of B-flat3. The vibraphone strikes the B-flat in unison to mark the change as well as to “trigger” the alto flute, which is trilling between concert A and B-flat. Again, the second structural pitch is augmented/thickened by a trill.

When the B-flat occurs in the Bernstein piece, the pitch G-sharp4 appears in flute 2 and in the harp. This could be interpreted as Bernstein “splitting” the opening A to make a B-flat and G-sharp, both notes being a semitone away from the original pitch. Druckman also includes the G-sharp in his score (G-sharp3). The note is punctuated by the vibraphone and bass clarinet. Clarinet 1 trills between concert G-sharp and A, while clarinet 2 sustains an A. In measure 4, the timpanist adds

texture by playing a measured tremolo on A3 with drum set brushes. At the highest dynamic of the timpani, the vibraphone fades in, also on A3. To close the gesture, the vibraphone rolls descend to F-sharp3. To tonally obscure the simple descent of the minor third, the concert tom-toms descend tonally down the drums, played with brushes; this gesture emerges from the timpani. The vibraphone’s punctuation of the F-sharp is timbrally enhanced by the low tom-tom and, more importantly, by a small explosive gesture by the temple blocks, a staple cadential gesture in Druckman’s language.

The second gesture in the “Kaddish” symphony takes place in measures 5–7 where the original three-note set is restated with more orchestral voices and with the strings and harp performing echoed variants of the motive beginning on different notes, which over the three bars, voice the majority of a chromatic aggregate containing all twelve pitches. For example, the basses and celli begin the motive on F-sharp in measure 4. The motive concludes on E-flat, at which time the violas begin the motive built on E-flat.

Druckman also restates the three-note set beginning in measure 7, but he begins using his own elaborations from this point forward. In measures 7–10 there is an abbreviated restatement of the Bernstein motive. The marimba and vibraphone state the A3 pitch with the clarinet. Again,



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the clarinets execute a quarter-tone trill, which gives the effect of wide vibrato. The vibraphone does not use motor vibrato, but Druckman's orchestration allows the clarinet's woodwind tone to synthesize the effect of a motor sound that is connected timbrally to both the marimba and vibraphone. This phrase is more like an echo or extension of the first; the B-flat pitch is skipped, and the vibraphone and clarinet sound the G-sharp with the vibraphone acting as a trigger to transition the clarinet sound to that of the alto flute, which sustains after the clarinet release. At this point the timpani (resonating the original A) and tomtoms begin their measured tremolos with brushes. To conclude the gesture, the tomtoms move down their range, and the timpani also glissandos downward before the sound is cut off by the grace-note gesture of the temple blocks.

The final gesture of the section takes place from measure 11 to Rehearsal 1. Vibraphone and marimba introduce the structural A pitch in measure 12, but this time in addition to the clarinet trill, the pitch is joined by a Harmon-muted trombone. Measure 11 shows the beginnings of Druckman's "flourish" technique, for which he is renowned. The trombone, vibraphone, marimba, and first piano entrance all sound B-flat3 on the second partial of a sixteenth-note triplet and resolve to A3. However, all the sounding instruments have different rhythmic means of approaching the downbeat. The effect is a short, scintillating, propulsive, and heterophonic burst that subsides into a collective unison. This concept of active events that precede a sustained structural pitch are evident throughout "Reflections on the Nature of Water," whether they be metered like the opening of movement 2 or as grace notes seen at the beginning of systems 4 and 5 of movement 1.

Again, Druckman elects to omit the B-flat3 pitch of Bernstein's original set, instead introducing the F-sharp/G-flat pitch in the piano and clarinet 2. Unexpectedly, the pitch B appears in measure 16 in the marimba, vibraphone, harp, trombone, and bass clarinet. Druckman may have

done this for several reasons. The addition of the B to the structural A and F-sharp notes produces a sudden sense of dominant harmony. Druckman's compositional goals independent of the Bernstein material may necessitate this note's inclusion to the work at this point. It's also possible that the glissandi/trill performed by the violin 1 part that ends the gesture are well suited to begin on B3.

The opening phrases of "Aureole" described above provide a kinetic momentum and anchoring of structural pitch, which allows the piece's narrative to begin in earnest at rehearsal 1. This idea of gradually adding musical activity to develop enough momentum for the next event in the music to take place is very much a Varèse-ian concept. This trait, as it appears in Druckman's orchestral music, is a critical concept to understanding the methods and structure of "Reflections on the Nature of Water" as well. The first five measures of movement 1 ("Crystalline") are not merely there to imitate water sounds. The number of water gestures develop momentum to gradually lower the tessitura on the marimba, but also to develop other musical activities such as the single grace-noted pitches and eventually the long tremolo that constitutes the next formal section of the movement. Druckman's decision to focus more of the A and F-sharp notes of Bernstein's "Kaddish" pitch set allows for a language that is more consonant (by deemphasizing the minor second interval) and building more open octatonic sonorities.

Closer investigation of the gestures in "Reflections" reveals a similar play with octatonic harmony, which is both consonant yet ambiguously tonal. Druckman's use of saturated unisons and bold perfect-fifth intervals mask this tendency somewhat, but it is his use of octatonic harmony that best reveals the influence of Debussy. And while Druckman's orchestral scores share modernist and contemporary traits with those of Berio, Lutosławski, Murail, and others, the core influences of Debussy and Stravinsky figure heavily into Druckman's output. It was Stravinsky's neo-clas-

sical style that saw the composer writing in older styles, using more woodwind and percussion scoring to punctuate and harden original music of Pergolesi and others. Druckman, in a sense, had made this sort of adaptation with the percussion instruments in his orchestral work. In addition to the use of keyboard percussion to punctuate and color instruments in the orchestra, Druckman often uses the percussion entrances as the original and "primordial" sound source from which the colors of the orchestra are permitted to emerge, as has been illustrated in the analysis above.

CONCLUSION

Jacob Druckman and his contemporaries bore a certain weight of musical history as composers, tethered both to accepted traditional techniques as well as opposing pressures to abandon past practices of tonality in an academic setting. His foray into electronic music developed his sense of dramatic gesture, which allowed him to find an original voice with his kinetically active and neo-impressionist language.

In the mid-1980s, Druckman was the sixth most programmed American composer, ranked only behind the likes of Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, William Schuman, Paul Hindemith, and Samuel Barber. Performances of Druckman's orchestral music have become less frequent over time as his scores, while highly regarded, must compete with common-practice masterworks and premieres of new works in orchestral season programming. However, orchestral and contemporary chamber percussionists should study and listen to Druckman's output, as his scoring, as described in this article, can help situate the role of the instruments in a modern setting. It should also be noted that Druckman's students, such as Aaron Jay Kernis, David Lang, Cindy McTee, Marc Mellits, and Augusta Read Thomas, among many others, have retained Druckman's comprehensive mastery of orchestration, but have embraced more individual approaches to musical language, texture, and affect that have re-invigorated contemporary American music in all the ways Druckman had

advocated during the Horizons Festivals of the 1980s.

It is the hope of this author that further study and analysis of Druckman's work will continue to situate his contributions as a critical transitional influence in the development of 21st Century American art music.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Perusal scores for many of Druckman's ensemble works can be viewed here: https://www.boosey.com/cr/perusals/power-search_results?composerid=2758.

Boosey & Hawkes' website and online perusal scores has been a most welcome addition for those studying Druckman's music. Scores such as "Shog," "Vox Humana," and "Mirage," among others, have only been viewable as by-mail perusals. Since pieces such as these were also not commercially recorded, it was only through poring through short journal and magazine entries that one who was not involved in the performances knew some of these works existed.

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Music. Papador has received prestigious grants from the Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, SSHRC, and Canada Foundation for Innovation. Papador is Associate Professor of Music at the School of Creative Arts at the University of Windsor. Papador's 2003 dissertation, *Jacob Druckman: A Bio-Bibliography and Guide to Research*, remains a regularly cited resource on the topic of Druckman and contemporary American music. **PN**

Samuli Viitanen Symphonic

The Timpanist's Main Tools for
Gaining Musical Clarity with
"Finlandia"

Using the standard timpani audition classic of Sibelius's "Finlandia," timpanist Samuli Viitanen, from the orchestra of the Finnish National Opera, will go through the three main aspects of timpani playing that have the most effect on how timpanists can alter their sound and start reaching out for a richer and more varied, personal soundscape. Being clearer and more musical in your interpretation comes from understanding some basic principles that will be explained thoroughly via "Finlandia." Viitanen will also touch a few other examples from the Finnish composer's music, getting some ideas regarding Sibelius's roll notation and how to play them clearly in different manners. Samuli Viitanen serves as alternative principal timpanist at the Finnish National Opera, teaches at the University of Arts Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, and is the percussion tutor of the Verbier Festival Junior Orchestra. Samuli's website, www.expressivemusician.com, will launch soon.



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