# Sforzando!

I.

At fourteen, I chose percussion because the drummers were so cute.

Behind the crowd of ululating clarinets, part of a native dance

whirling, spinning – bass drum to snare, to triangle, blocks, tambourine,

and the cymbals

made to be heard, not hidden.

II.

Hit one with a stick and it shimmers.

A soft mallet yields a muffled gong.

Brush the edges gently

dampening vibrations against the breast,

or perform a full-fledged, triple-forte

KER-RASH—

cymbal at the peak;

the exclamation point!

III.

In a parade I held them close, my brisk chink at the end of each 8-bar cadence necessary to keep marchers in step. Sweaty canvas straps encircling wrists, the cymbals grew

heavier with each passing block. Bent for two slow miles, my elbows seemed to lock in the cymbal-holding position forever.

IV.

One Christmas, our organist planned a special song

for the annual Midnight Service.

Relaxed parishioners were soothed by the lateness

of the hour, the day, the time of year.

The dark sputtered with candles

in the quiet stillness of the sanctuary

until the moment when I leapt in

with my forte cymbal crash!

Someone questioned the minister

about the appropriateness of cymbals in church.

In the New Year, the organist copied a Biblical quotation

and posted it on the bulletin board:

*Praise the Lord with harp and cymbal.*

V.

Years later, I thrill to the Moscow State Symphony

performing Shostakovich’s 5th.

The cymbal-filled finale comes in crashing waves,

one after another, saturating the hall.

*This has got to be the end—this has got to be the end—*

they keep coming and coming, higher and higher,

until the sound lifts me up

and pulls me down in an undertow of resonance.

All the sound waves penetrate every corner, every crevasse,

and my head is filled up with a loud, shimmering horizon

of silence.

Holding my breath,

I know

I will never be the same again.

We find the ground, leap to our feet,

our thunder a blur of white noise

after the stunning of the cymbals.