

# Lizée's *Katana of Choice* (2014/2016)

Ben Reimer, drumkit, with soundtrack and film

## PROGRAM NOTE

*Katana of Choice* is a simulated duel-based “visual novel” type video game where the graphics, soundtrack, and narrative are enhanced by the live performance. Originally written for percussion quartet and solo drum kit, a subsequent version was created for solo drum kit for which the members of the quartet—TorQ Percussion—recorded their parts separately from the kit player. Their parts were synchronized with original video, which extrapolates the semiotics and imagery of the original live version.

Inspired by wuxia martial arts and film noir (*Five Fingers of Death*, *Enter the Dragon*, *Kill Bill*, *The Warriors*), the pace is relentless, moving quickly from scene to scene with unexpected twists, where the kit player trades off with the “virtual quartet”—pushing one another technically and sonically. The writing depicts the semiotics of the genres acoustically while analogue synths, cap guns, acoustic guitars in specific tunings, foot stomps, hand claps, and call-and-response vocalizations all become percussion instruments and visual enhancements. Panning, stereophony, and spatial treatments are carefully considered to evoke an immersive, sonic 3D, otherworldly experience.

—Nicole Lizée

## PERFORMER'S NOTE

I have performed *Katana of Choice* by Nicole Lizée for almost a decade now and can confidently say it is my favourite piece to play. Starting with the premiere of *Katana* in its original form (2014) as a work for TorQ Percussion and me, to the solo version (2016) with pre-recorded track and video, I have played the piece at such notable events as the JUNO Classical Music Showcase (2019), Winnipeg New Music Festival (2022), and most recently the *Rhythm in Music since 1900* conference at McGill (2023).

*Katana of Choice* combines a nod to the celebrated past while exploring exciting new ground. The past: Nicole references iconic drummers and grooves such as Bernard Purdie's shuffle, Steve Gadd's 4-stick solo technique, and the instantly recognizable blast beat and double kick pedal techniques that are at the foundation

of metal music.<sup>1</sup> The future: these iconic elements are recontextualized to create something new in a variety of ways. Nicole takes a traditional beat but changes the meter, loops the groove in unexpected ways, or takes an element and surprises us with a different voice. For example, the “Purdie Shuffle” appears glitched out and looped into challenging new patterns, while the most recognizable aspect of the groove (the snare accents and ghost notes) are not played on the snare drum but rather on a Korg Kaossilator pad (5).

Since my first premiere of Nicole’s music (*Ringer*, 2009) to *Katana of Choice* and with every new collaboration, I am linked to the rich history of the drumkit. I have recognized that this must remain at the core of my interpretation and performance of Nicole’s music while being open to new techniques and modes of expression. This has resulted in my own unique performance practice combining western classical performance, contemporary new music, and a broad range of drumkit techniques. Through over two decades of collaborations with Nicole Lizée, I’ve had the honour of bringing so much amazing music to audiences around the world. I’m forever grateful for each experience. *Katana of Choice* is Nicole’s perfect example of the unique evolution of the drum kit, the expressive potential that is possible today: it leaves us wondering what new ideas are still to come.

–Ben Reimer, May 2025



*Media 1: Katana of Choice (2014/2016) by Nicole Lizée, performed by Ben Reimer, 23 September 2023, Tanna Schulich Hall/Salle Tanna Schulich, Schulich School of Music/École de musique Schulich, McGill University.*

<sup>1</sup> For examples of these techniques, see the performance video at the following timestamps: Bernard Purdie’s shuffle ([13:35](#)), Steve Gadd’s 4-stick solo technique ([9:30](#)), metal blast beat ([4:31](#)), and double kick pedal techniques ([17:10](#)).