

The Drumline Experience: Part 2

Wisdom from the Panel

BY PAUL BUYER

On November 11 at PASIC 2006 in Austin, the PAS Education Committee hosted its much anticipated panel discussion, “The Drumline Experience: How Much is Too Much?” The distinguished panelists were Dennis DeLucia, DCI and WGI Hall of Famer and a former faculty member at Rutgers University; Julie Davila, PAS Marching Committee Chair, WGI Adjudicator, and member of the Caixa Trio; Robert Carnochan, Associate Director of Bands and Director of the Longhorn Band at the University of Texas at Austin; Ward Durrett, WGI Hall of Famer and drumline instructor at the University of Northern Colorado; and Brian Hanner, Assistant Band Director and Director of Percussion at La Porte (TX) High School.

The purpose of the discussion was to focus on the role marching percussion has in high school and college percussion programs in the United States and discuss whether or not today’s percussionists are spending too much time in the marching percussion activity.

The panel members shared their views on competition and the indoor drumline activity, and offered perspectives on becoming a well-rounded musician. Throughout the discussion the importance of leadership and students being put in the hands of the right teacher was emphasized.

The discussion began with opening statements from the panel members about their philosophy of “The Drumline Experience: How Much is Too Much?” followed by prepared questions chosen by members of the Education Committee. The following edited transcription represents the best of what was said at PASIC 2006.

DeLucia: My viewpoint is very simple. In the hands of a good teacher—and by that I mean one who can inspire confidence in his kids psychologically; one who teaches from a perspective, technically, that can be used and not abused and can be applied elsewhere to concert percus-

sion and drumset percussion; one who is a good writer, meaning one who writes musically and idiomatically; one who conducts quality rehearsals and knows how to do that, knows how to organize; one who teaches the importance of teamwork, meaning the ensemble, which is ultimately the paramount thing for percussionists and all musicians; one who uses competition as a motivational device rather than the end-all (the idea’s not to beat that group, it’s to get the most out of yourself that you possibly can using competition as the motivator); and one who encourages the appreciation of all styles of music—I would say in the hands of that person, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with it whatsoever.

“The most important thing is for my students to become musicians. In the hands of an inspirational teacher, just about any musical activity can serve that end.”—Brian Hanner

Davila: Through my journey as a player, teacher, and adjudicator my philosophy continues to change. Striving for excellence in any activity is a valid, worthwhile cause. I agree with Dennis that whether the experience is a positive or a negative or if it’s too much or not enough is definitely in the hands of the teacher. I think drumline is kind of a “hook” at a young age, and I don’t think that there’s really anything wrong with that because there was something at some point in all of our lives that hooked us first, that we were passionate about, and then broadened our perspective as we grew.

I think it teaches great life skills such as a great work ethic, teamwork, persistence, and responsibility. You also have to set up long-term goals for kids to reach, and in our society of instant gratification, I don’t think there’s enough of that. So for this activity to teach kids to work a long period of time towards a long-term goal,

I think that’s a great, valid cause as well and an aspect of it that I think we can all appreciate.

In terms of the teacher, as long as everybody approaches it as the journey being more important than the outcome, then the competition aspect of it takes care of itself. It needs to be balanced in a portion of a piece of pie in education.

Carnochan: I also think it’s a question of balance. At the university level, something we deal with is either people having just that experience—just that interest of wanting to be drumline members—versus being a member of the whole, like the university band. Sometimes drumlines can get isolated. They’re really interested in what they do, and although

they are part of the band, it’s a very disconnected kind of relationship. I think that’s a very important thing we need to be concerned about.

The other thing that I really think is important is this long-range goal that Julie mentioned. What is the purpose of all this? Is it to instill an appreciation of art? Is it to give some students something to do not to get in trouble? Why are we doing this?

For me it’s a question of art. That’s what brought me to music to begin with. Whatever your instrument is, if it’s to create a new art form, great! Then it’s generated because of the art form itself and not because of who’s going to win. If it’s all generated by competition and who’s going to win, then it becomes a question of, is this an art form or a sport? In education across the board, we have to be very careful about that.

Durrett: My perspective comes more from the historical side. My original motivation years ago was the fact that appraisal of percussion on the football field in the fall was dismal, and kids needed more input. So the activity kind of grew out of the need for improved input, as an extension

of the marching season at that time. It has shifted to the spring, but the motivation was still input and the education of the students.

The concerns we had years and years ago and the concerns we have now—nothing's changed. The activity has evolved in terms of how many kids are involved. If you think about it from a judging context, what you come to realize is that when you're praising a performance, you're not praising the kids, you're praising the staff because the kids are just doing what they're asked to do. Everything you're doing is making judgment calls on what the staff is doing, so as Dennis, Rob, and Julie said, it all falls on the staff people. And if the drumline experience is too much, it could be because it's in the wrong hands.

Hanner: For me, the most important thing is for my students to become musicians. In the hands of an inspirational teacher, just about any musical activity can serve that end. At the program where I teach, once we're done with marching band in the fall, the drums go up and all we do is concert ensemble in the spring. I participate in WGI in the concert ensemble division, and the competitive aspect is a hook and definitely one of the ways I've been able to get my kids interested in more concert ensemble. Through that I'm able to do lots of other things that they probably wouldn't have bought into in the beginning.

There's a lot to be said for being able to do a piece six, seven, eight times. You learn as you go, and it's amazing to watch the progression from the first performance to the last. Like Julie mentioned, the journey's the goal, rather than the end being the goal. Personally, I've decided I'm going to stand my ground and pick literature that I want to play and what I think the kids should do, and if the judges like it, great. If they don't like it as much, then the students understand there's something bigger at stake here.

Buyer: *Should we be concerned that the drumline experience is the only musical experience some students are receiving?*

Carnochan: Yes! It's a matter of balance. Just having that experience and only that experience, whether it be indoor drumline or pretty much anything else, I think is a questionable thing.

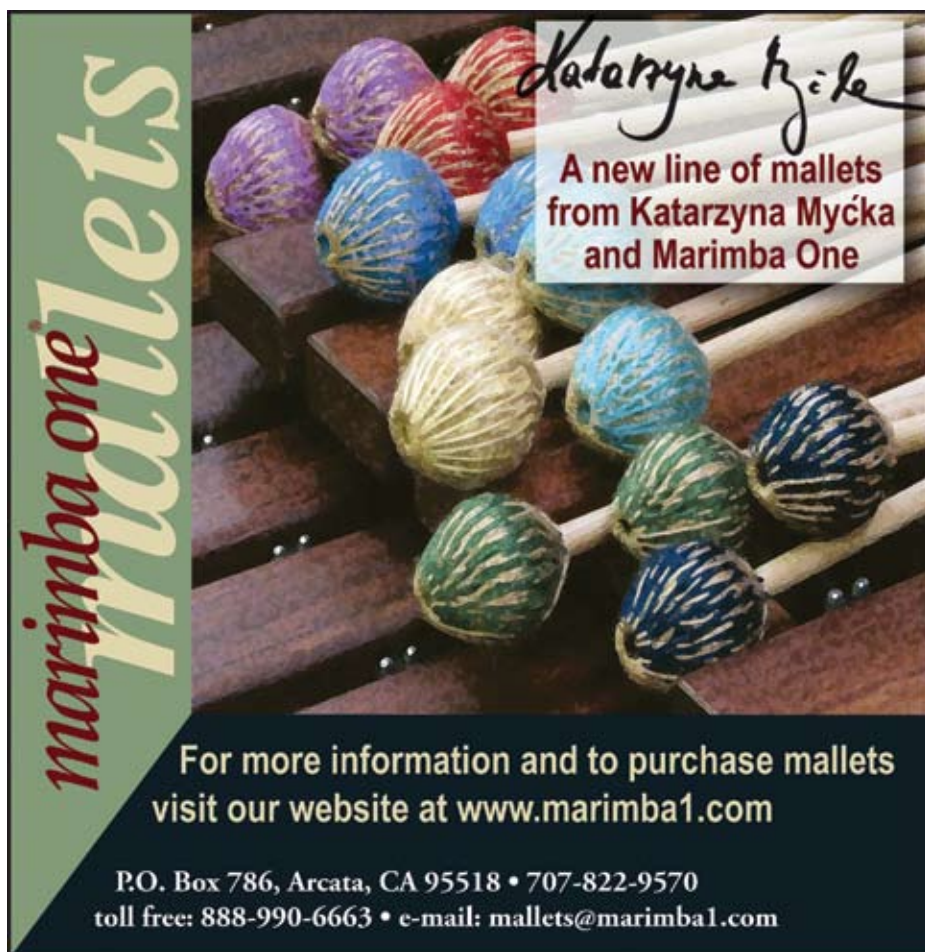
Davila: I definitely think there should be some discussion about that. I think a lot of times it just depends on where the kids are at in their development and what direction they're going to take. If they're majoring in music and choosing that path, maybe that's a little unbalanced, because they have so many other things that they need to be addressing as well. But I do know there are students who can handle that situation. It's time management on their behalf.

We have a ton of kids in this activity who will never major in music, so to create an activity like this to give everyone some of the values we talked about, I think it has value; again, it just needs to stay balanced. If it's kids that you really think are going to go into education, then as a teacher, you need to make sure that that's one piece of their education.

DeLucia: I think it's fascinating that we're having this conversation in Texas, because the state of Texas, in terms of music education, is an aberration. Allegedly, there are 18,000 or so high schools in the

United States. If I was very generous, I would say maybe 500 of them have figured it out in terms of solid percussion education. The ones that have figured it out have used the Texas model of vertical teaching, where a percussion specialist teaches at the elementary school, the middle school, and the high school. While I think it's incredible that those 500 programs have figured it out, 200 are in Texas alone.

But I'm interested in the other 17,500 who haven't figured it out! I want to be sure that we are going to positively allow opportunities for kids who might not have the luxury of vertical teaching. And if a marching ensemble is the only thing a school can offer, and that teacher has the right frame of mind—positive rather than negative and destructive, a teaching approach to technique that is applicable to other things (not just the "squeeze and moan" approach), that can be used elsewhere if the student has the opportunity—I think that's the framework we must consider. If there are several opportunities, I would hope that the teacher



Katarzyna Myćka

A new line of mallets from Katarzyna Myćka and Marimba One

marimba one mallets

For more information and to purchase mallets visit our website at www.marimba1.com

P.O. Box 786, Arcata, CA 95518 • 707-822-9570
toll free: 888-990-6663 • e-mail: mallets@marimba1.com

would encourage the kids to partake in all of them.

Buyer: *Is transfer value taking place between marching and concert percussion, and are we fully using the learning potential of the drumline experience?*

Durrett: In particular settings I think absolutely, especially with the evolution of the activity. Everything's working its way towards the middle and towards one approach no matter what the setting is. Instead of a situation where it's just marching, just concert, just orchestral, it's starting to blend into one application. I go back to Dennis' statement that in a large majority of programs, who knows? The potential's absolutely there.

Carnochan: I've talked to several people I respect greatly who either are in the thick of things at the public school level or teaching percussion at the university level, and the people I've talked to say by and large there's not a lot of transfer being taught from what they've seen. Not to say that there can't be, and I think there certainly can be. As everybody has already said, that's completely up to the teachers and how they approach the medium.

I think the things that can be transferred need to be talked about with the students on a very regular basis. But this goes back to what's the long-term purpose of this? If you're trying to create a well-rounded percussionist who is going to be a music major and then go out and teach, then transfer is wildly important. If it's someone who's going to be a doctor and that person just loves doing it, it's not such a big deal.

DeLucia: Everything I've had in a career comes out of my love and my devotion to the drum and bugle corps world, but I've been able to branch out and do other things. But I've never taught a kid to play a snare drum, a multi-tenor, or a bass drum in any way that would inhibit his or her ability to learn other things. In the hands of the right teacher, there is tremendous transfer value.

The negative side of that is that in the hands of the wrong person, it is very detrimental. I would see those high school kids come in to audition: A kid would play a rudimental snare drum solo on his Kevlar drum and would be flam-dragging everything, and you'd go, "That's pretty impressive." Then he would go over to the concert snare and play a Cirone piece the same way he just played the rudimental piece, and then he'd go and hit the xylophone with that same "angry at the world" approach. That's not good at all, but that wouldn't be good in anything, regardless of where that instruction came from. So here again, in the hands of the right person, the right approach, it's extremely positive.

Hanner: What Dennis said is right on. It's a great activity. There's huge potential for great things to happen, for all the right things to be taught, and to be guided to transfer to other activities. The details of concert snare drum playing are very different than the details of playing a marching drum. You can teach the marching end in a way that's going to transfer over, but you also have to transfer. When you have kids that are heavily involved all year in marching percussion, no matter how well they're taught, their concert snare drum playing is probably not go-

ing to be as sensitive as somebody who doesn't play marching percussion all year. The leadership decides it all.

In many programs, the concert band is by far the organization that's running the show. I've heard from a lot of directors over the years—who support the activity and support that their students do it—that they notice a difference in the way their percussionists approach the instruments in a spring semester when they're not marching as opposed to a spring semester where they are. I think that's just a result of where you're spending your time. Even under really good instruction, there's going to be a little bit of that grey area where not everything works in both places. It's the outer fringes of the details that are very difficult to transfer, no matter how good the teaching.

Davila: Kids are usually a product of their environment. If they're being guided in the right way through the process, I think it can be very positive. To be in this activity, kids' maturity levels have to be in the right frame of mind, because they could be misguided if you're not careful. I think there's tremendous transfer value in what is possible, whether it always comes to fruition or not. It's up to the individual teacher.

Buyer: *This is obviously a very passionate topic for all of us. I remember the first time the Education Committee submitted this idea to the Executive Committee for approval. They wrote back and said, "It's approved, and we're going to look into hiring you a bodyguard for PASIC. Make sure you identify the emergency exits in the room!"*

I would like to thank the panelists for their time, passion, and commitment, and for getting to the heart of some very challenging questions about teaching, leadership, and percussion education.

Paul Buyer is Director of Percussion and Associate Professor of Music at Clemson University. He is a member of the PAS Marching Percussion and College Pedagogy Committees and is chair of the Education Committee. PN



PERCUSSION SOURCE
FOR THE SERIOUS PLAYER
FROM BEGINNER TO PRO

Browse our full catalog online!

WWW.PERCUSSIONSOURCE.COM

MALLETS
MARIMBAS
TIMPANI
CYMBALS
STICKS
TRIANGLES
GLOCKENSPIELS >
TAMBOURINES
MUCH MORE!

Quality

The Product of Our Passion.

John Pate
Florida State University

Adams Philharmonic Dresden Timpani Feature:

- Dresden Style Pedal Mechanism (Manual Foot-Operated Design)
- Copper Hammered Cambered Bowls
- Patented Special Design Split Rocker Arm for Super Smooth Silent Pedal Action
- Special Design Strong & Light Struts
- Fine Tuner
- Extremely Accurate Tuning Gauges
- Chrome Plated Counter Hoops, Tension Rods & Centering Devices
- Renaissance Timpani Heads w/insert Rings
- Covers Included



Philharmonic
CONCERT GRADE DRUM

Dresden Concert

Pearl Philharmonic Series Snare Drums

- Available in 4 Shell Materials, Solid Maple, 6 ply Maple, 3mm Cast Aluminum
- Triad Silent Strainer
- Tube Lugs
- Graduated tension Snares
- Thumbscrew Tension Adjusters
- Die Cast Hoops
- 3 Snare types
- Extremely Wide Dynamic Range

Pearl Philharmonic Concert Bass Drums

- 100% African Mahogany
- 4 ply 5mm Shell w/27 Maple Hoops
- Silent Tension System w/8mm Handle Bolts
- NUSKYN Concert Bass Drum Heads
- #210 Matte Walnut Lacquer Finish

Garry Kvintal
NEXUS

Adams Vibraphones Feature:

- Graduated Anodized Silver Bars
- Height Adjustable Traveler, Voyager or Endurance Field Frame
- Covered Motor & Rubber Bands for Protection From the Elements
- Top Mounted On/Off Switch & Speed Adjustment Control
- Dual Closed/Open Resonator Fan Switch Control
- Advanced Dampening System w/Pedal Tension, Damper & Height Adjustment
- Covers & Mallets Included

Robert Van Sic
Pearlbody Conservatory
Yale School of Music

Adams Artist Series Marimbas Feature:

- Honduras Rosewood Bars
- Tuned through the sixth Overtone
- Welded Resonators Offer Maximum Sustain, Volume & Clarity (Powder Coated)
- Height Adjustable Voyager Frame
- Covers & Mallets Included

ADAMS

www.pearldrums.com

Pearl