

# How Rudiments are used in the College Curriculum

BY PAUL BUYER

In the college percussion curriculum, rudiments are most commonly used in the marching percussion ensemble. At some universities, the drumline is the catalyst for recruiting students to the program because for many it was their most powerful musical experience in high school. Based on this experience, most students have a certain degree of training on rudimental snare drum. This training, however, rarely encompasses all 40 rudiments. Instead, a typical rudimental background might include the single-stroke roll, single-stroke seven, multiple-bounce roll, paradiddle, paradiddle-diddle, flam, flam accent, flam tap, and double-stroke roll. Other rudiments such as the ten-stroke roll, single flamed mill, and single dragadiddle may not have been introduced.

I have always considered the snare drum the nucleus of percussion education and believed that everything in percussion—in one way or another—can be traced back to the snare drum. Throughout our history, the rudiments have formed our language and shaped our vocabulary while defining the essential skills one must develop to play percussion music.

According to DCI Hall of Famer Dennis DeLucia, “[Rudiments] are the foundation of all drumming—corps, marching band, orchestral, concert band, and drumset. They are as important to drummers as scales, arpeggios, and chords are to a pianist.” Haskell Harr, the “Father of Percussion,” once said that the purpose of the rudiments “is to provide a basic system for developing dexterity with the hands for the control of the drumsticks...[and for] the development and maintenance of the most basic percussion skills.”

Throughout my research, I came across several articles that did *not* fully endorse the educational value of the rudiments. Many pointed to the lack of rudiments found in concert band and orchestral repertoire, and the failure of rudiments to address fundamental musical concepts such as phrasing, sight-reading, tempos, and meters. While no one suggests that the rudiments should be the sole course of snare drum study, most advocate their use as important in addition to developing stick control, reading skills, coordination, sticking concepts, stamina, and other rudimental and orchestral snare drumming techniques.

## TEACHING TOTAL PERCUSSION

Teaching total percussion remains the biggest challenge facing today's college percussion teacher. Balancing snare drum, mallet/keyboard, timpani, drumset, accessories, world and Latin percussion within a four-year program of study is not an easy task for the teacher or the student. The challenge, then, is to not only balance snare drum study within the total percussion curriculum, but to balance the study of the rudiments within snare drum study.

According to Kenneth Mueller in his 1972 book, *Teaching Total Percussion*:

Traditionally the snare drum has been the foundation in the training of most percussionists. In many cases it has also been the extent of that training as well. If we are to develop total percussionists, we must place the snare drum in its proper perspective as part of the total percussion...We have placed such emphasis on the snare drum, to the exclusion of most of the other percussion instruments, that many of our students now feel that being a percussionist means to play the snare drum.

The study of the rudiments and rudimental solos should be used as a technique builder which develops usable skills but not as the ultimate achievement in the area of snare drum training...I do not feel that the primary objective of a student's training on snare drum should be limited to the...rudiments. The student should be taught to play the snare drum in an intelligent and musical manner.

Others contend that the focus on rudiments and rudimental drumming has created a division of philosophical approaches or “camps.” There seem to be students who are only interested in drumline, drum corps, and rudimental snare drumming, and others who are interested in percussion. According to Larry McCormick in his article “Rudimental Drummer or Percussionist—Can We Be Both?”:

Primarily the rudimentalist is concerned with technique, in other words development of dexterity and hand coordination. He spends most of his practice time on the rudiments, striving for perfection of each particular pattern. He does this because the music, which he plays [in drum corps], is composed entirely of these so-called rudiments. He is concerned with obtaining the highest possible score in a drum corps contest, and scoring in competition is based primarily on uniformity of the section....

Usually, very little attention is paid to music reading for the rudimentalist...Reading is not of major importance to drum corps drummers, because they generally play the same collection of parts for an entire year; and seeing that they have to memorize their parts, it is very easy for them to learn their music by rote. It is the rudimentalist's job to memorize his music each year and then constantly strive to perfect it from the standpoint of execution.

According to University of Arizona Percussion Professor and PAS President-elect Gary Cook:

[As a result of NARD in the 1930s,] the rudimental system [was] *the* popular standard in American drumming. Study of the rudiments was undertaken by almost every drummer in a school

music program, and the mastery of the rudiments resulted in a well-developed technical facility. This facility, when related to a musical concept of phrasing and when other stylistic concerns were understood, could be applied successfully to other forms of percussion performance.

Unfortunately, the successful application of these rudimental fundamentals to other musical settings and styles too often failed to occur, and this led to other pedagogical approaches to percussion. These other approaches tended to de-emphasize the role of rudimental mastery, and instead developed technical facility through the use of other technical studies and related them more to the overall musical concept of percussion performance.

Only when mastery of rudimental precision style drumming is seen as the ultimate achievement for aspiring percussionists is a real, unfortunate, injustice done by preventing the development of total percussion concepts and techniques.

### A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

I asked one of my students, David Garrison, about studying the rudiments in college. He responded:

Learning the rudiments most commonly takes place in high school, in preparation for solo and ensemble festival or all-region band. Rudiments are also taught in high school percussion classes. Rudiments teach you sticking concepts and develop muscle memory, kinesthetic learning, and maturity in your muscles. It also helps your reading by recognizing rudiments in solo pieces as you practice. It helps the mental game by making harder music easier.

In college today, most students practice the rudiments on their own, mostly the hybrids, in hopes of making a drum corps or winter drumline. Many college students do not study rudiments formally as part of their studio lessons, unless they did not learn them in high school.

### THE APPLIED STUDIO

There are students who enter college percussion programs *without* marching band experience or a basic rudimental background. There are also those who played in their cymbal line or front ensemble and did not develop rudimental drumming technique. Whatever the case, teaching the rudiments in private lessons is common in the college curriculum.

There are three rudimental method books that I recommend for motivation and musical growth. The first is *Contemporary Rudimental Studies and Solos* by Lalo Davila. According to the author, "The approach of this book is to study each rudiment individually, increasing the tempo and complexity of its treatment. The study of each rudiment culminates in a short solo that utilizes only that rudiment. Each solo has a musical accompaniment to aid the performer in achieving steady tempos and musical phrasing."

Davila's book is the first book I pull out of my file cabinet when working with a student who needs help with rudiments. I find that the book encourages and requires metronome use, develops technical facility, and when working on the solos, greatly improves reading skills. The CD is an excellent resource for developing listening skills and hearing the solos played at a professional level. It is also a fun way to



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learn the rudiments. The book is written at an intermediate–intermediate/advanced level.

Another book I pull out frequently is *Savage Rudimental Workshop* by Matt Savage. This book is written in the same manner as Davila's, with an accompaniment CD, progressive exercises, and solos based on each rudiment. This book is written at an advanced level and is a great complement to Davila's.

One of the standard texts I often use in applied snare drum study, especially with advanced players, is *The Drummer's Rudimental Reference Book* by John Wooton. The book contains hundreds of exercises to develop the technique needed to play the rudiments. According to the author, the book provides a "prescription for my rudimentally ailing students." If a student is having problems with a particular rudiment, practicing the exercises in this book should result in fewer problems.

Another method I use to teach the rudiments is Jeff Moore's "Hands Separate/Hands Together" approach, in which each hand plays separately to define its rhythm. Once a student is able to see and hear each hand's rhythm and is able to practice the proper motions, it is easier to put the hands together. A similar approach employed by Johnny Lee Lane, Director of Percussion at IUPUI, is called "Rudiments in Slow Motion." Lane calls his system, "The real deal."

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

Throughout the past decade, the growth and popularity of DCI and WGI has led to innovative writing styles and unprecedented performance levels, including the significant impact hybrid rudiments have had on contemporary rudimental drumming and marching percussion. So popular are these hybrids that at the time of this writing, the PAS Marching Percussion Committee is discussing a supplemental list of hybrid rudiments to add to the 40 International Drum Rudiments.

As mentioned before, the study of rudiments in the college curriculum is most evident in the marching percussion ensemble. A drumline's warm-ups, cadences, and show music will contain certain rudiments that students must be able to play if they are going to be successful. In contrast, the rudiments and their importance may take on a different role in private lessons, percussion ensemble, orchestra, and concert band. While I think everyone would agree that the rudiments are important, it is ultimately up to the teacher to determine their priority.

The landscape of today's four-year percussion curriculum has changed dramatically with the addition of marimba ensembles, steel bands, African, Brazilian, and Cuban ensembles, gamelans, electronic percussion ensembles, and indoor drumlines. The emphasis put on these genres as part of the total percussion experience sends a message that priorities are shifting. Students have more to do than ever before and also more to choose from. The time spent teaching anything, including the rudiments, must be carefully balanced throughout a student's college career.

Dan Moore's article "The War on Rudiments" concludes by saying, "The importance of the rudiments is in the philosophy that they embody and how we choose to apply that phi-

losophy to our specific situation." If ten college teachers were asked to describe how they use rudiments in their curriculum, we would most likely get ten different answers. And in the spirit of PAS, we would also get a lot of ideas.

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