

Drums & Percussion

A Brief History Of Drums, Drummers, and Drumming with a Practical Application to Drumset

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HISTORY:

We'll take a brief look at the fascinating history and culture of Drums and other Percussion Instruments and how they've evolved over 8000 years!

RUDIMENTS:

Where they came from, why they're so important, and some fun and exciting ideas!



STICKS & MALLETS:

Why what you play with can be just as important as what you play! Also some cool ideas on how to get some new, fun and unusual sounds out of your drums.

CARING FOR YOUR SOUND:

How and why to care for your percussion instruments - and to care for the most important and valuable instrument you will ever own - your body!

PUTTING IT ALL TO WORK:



How to take simple rhythms, patterns, and rudiments and adapt them for drumset and

other percussion instruments. Also why rudiments and scales don't stop at just the snare drum!



History of an Art Form

Although when we think of instruments like snare drum, bass drum and toms, our minds jump very quickly to 'music'. It is interesting that this has not always been the case, as 'music' is a relatively new phenomenon. Drums today come in all shapes and sizes, and such was the case about 8000 years ago. All drums have a couple of things in common - 1) A resonator, such as a drum shell or hollow log, and B) A membrane or skin stretched and attached to the resonator. Again, the earliest drums were not used for music, but for a variety of other things such as sending signals over long distances, summoning up spirits during religious ceremonies, and especially in warfare. Imagine the fear an army would feel if before they even saw their enemy, they could hear the roar of the battle signals and feel the rumble of the fast approaching army.



Look at these drums played with both sticks and hands from South Africa. Although we consider these drums very musical, at the time of their inception they most likely had a strong religious and spiritual significance.

Percussion Categories

When most people think of drums, congas, bongos, or tympani, they think percussion. I'd like to take a moment to explain the different categories that are in the percussion family. There are two main categories which are Membranophones and Idiophones.

Membranophones: These are instruments whose primary sound is produced by the vibration of a stretched membrane. Let's break this down a little. Think of a snare drum or a tom. Both of these instruments have two drum heads, a batter head (the head you strike) and a resonant head. The heads are actually membranes, scientifically speaking. When you strike a snare drum head, it causes air to move around inside the shell, which acts as a resonator. Some examples of membranophones are bongos, snare drums, bass drums, frame drums, tympani, and timbales. Membranophones can have either one drum head (membrane) or two. The earliest types of membranophones used animal hides and even in some cases lizard as the drum head!

Idiophones: These are instruments where the sound is produced by vibration from whatever you are striking it with. That is to say, the sound is coming from the instruments body itself, rather than a head causing the vibrations. Some common idiophones are Marimba, Xylophone, Crotales, Cymbals, Rattles, Vibraphone, and Chimes.

Pitched Percussion

As you probably know, there are a lot of instruments that are pitched. You may be familiar with bells, glockenspiel, xylophone, and marimba to name a few. Also, you've probably noticed that it is more common to have a pitched idiophone than a pitched membranophone. However, it is possible, although very difficult, to tune a double headed drum like a tom to a specific pitch, although it can be done. An innovative artist who used this tuning technique on his drumset is Terry Bozzio. The most common pitched membranophones used in western music are kettle drums, or tympani.



The Language of Drumming

To some people rudiments are fun and exciting, to others, they seem boring and pointless...an endless succession of rights and lefts and flams and drums with no real idea of their purpose. I think that sometimes the problem lies in two places - 1. Many kids don't really understand what they are, and 2. Many students don't know what they can become.

First, let's consider the history of rudiments. As mentioned earlier, drums were originally used for call, signals, warnings, and warfare. If we think of the nature of the snare drum, it is not an instrument with definite pitch - that is to say that no scale or melodies can be played upon its head. This leaves only one thing - Rhythm. Although we can't play a scale, or a triad, or even a recognizable melody from a favorite song, we are left with endless possibilities of rhythm, timbre, dynamics, and tonal colors - perhaps more than any other instrument. Because signals, and warnings would not make sense if they were chaotic, lacked order, and changed from person to person, a standard set of patterns were developed, to which we now call rudiments. Rudiments were originally taught

by rote and played from memory. No history of written drum notation can be found prior to 1600 in Switzerland, although rudiments we already well in use. The Swiss claim the invention of many rudiments and do rightfully have some due credit, although it is likely that rudiments were being played in other parts of the world at this time in history as well. In a nutshell, if you were an army engaged in war, it would be a good idea to have a well trained military band on your side march with you...back then, it could have saved your life.

So, now we know the history of rudiments from the 1600's, but you may still be wondering, what in the world does that have to do with me? Let's again go back to basics. I argue that music is nothing more than a

series of tones, frequencies, and rhythms played, that may be either pleasant or unpleasant to the listener. I find, that at the basis of music there is order - there are patterns. Once some basic patterns are mastered, that is where the real fun comes in! For pitched instruments you have patterns like scales, modes, and chords. For snare drum you have patterns such as rudiments and stickings. Once this is realized, it is no stretch to apply them to other instruments. Although quite different, playing a drumset would not be possible if there were no such thing as rudiments. You may wonder how rudiments apply to the drum kit and other instruments, and we'll get to that in a moment. To hear some great recordings rudiments applied to a drumset, check out the legendary Steve Gadd - he uses rudiments in fills, grooves, and solos on tunes such as 'Aja' by Steely Dan or '50 Ways To Leave Your Lover' by Paul Simon.

COOL FACT ALERT: *Do you know the original reason for a flam or a ruff??? It is so when someone is listening, it sounds like there are more than just one person playing the same thing! An easy way to trick your enemy that your army of 200 people is more like 400 - 600!*



Choose Your Weapon...errr...Stick!

I'm sure that many of you have held different types of sticks and mallets before, and we maybe trying to figure out what to use when. While there is no 'Perfect Stick' for everything, and are some types that are good for all around usage. There are a few things to consider when choosing a pair of mallets or sticks. Here are some questions I ask myself before choosing a pair for my playing:

-What type of instrument will I be playing on? Larger drums sometimes require larger and heavier sticks. Small jazz drumsets only need the slightest touch from a pair of properly controlled sticks.

-What style of music am I playing? Am I going to be thrashing away live playing some metal, or am I going to have to play short, pianissimo passages with a small chamber ensemble?

-What stick or mallet will give me the best control without sacrificing quality of sound?



Some other things that you may consider is your own particular hand size, and preference of weight. Do you prefer a heavier stick or a lighter stick. Do you need a hard mallet for a quick and articulate xylophone

run, or are you playing a more legato chorale on a marimba. Ultimately the choice is up to YOU. Try out as many different sticks and mallets that you can, and over time, you should choose what is most comfortable for you. A common mistake is to use a signature pair that one of your favorite drummers uses. Remember that pair was specifically made for him/her, and may not be the best musical choice for you.

MORE THAN JUST MUSIC

When was the last time you cleaned your ears? Did you eat a healthy breakfast this morning? They may sound like pretty random questions, but they are amazingly important...and...kind of cool. I skipped one part about the history of drums. I left out the first, and possibly the most important drum of all, your eardrum. Just like a membranophone in your ear there is a membrane, just like that of a drum head, which vibrates. Think of a sound you really enjoy hearing, maybe its a cool drum solo, maybe it's the sound of the ocean, or maybe your favorite radio station. This is what happens, something produces a sound which causes air molecules to push and vibrate up against one another. These vibrating air molecules enter your ear canal, ripple through some fluid like ripples in a stream, and then make contact with the eardrum. The membrane of the drum vibrates which your brain then interprets as sound...or music...or the ocean. If you don't keep good hygiene, and wear appropriate ear protection while practicing, your eardrum can become damaged, causing you to not hear certain things again.

So that's the first drum in the world, can you guess what the first rhythm was? How about the heartbeat. Thump-pa-thump...Thump-pa-thump...Thump-pa-thump. Wow! The first rhythm that humans got to hear! Just like your ears, if you don't eat healthy and stay active, your heart can become weak too.



Instruments that we play and enjoy are very similar. It is important to take proper care of them, clean them, and keep a regular maintenance schedule. Without this, the instrument will begin to age, lose it's tone and sparkle, and it will not be able to share the sound it once had with others to enjoy. Instruments should be cared for, respected, and something that you are proud to play on!

Sound Possibilities

Instead of just trying different sticks, go one step further and experiment with new things altogether. There are many options available for new sounds. Instead of using sticks you can use brushes, this gives a lighter, more airy feel. You can also try out some tympani mallets on your drumset or even snare drum. Timbale sticks work great for a thin, yet articulate sound on drums and cymbals. Bundle sticks are also common to play the drums with, you may have heard them called lightning rods or rutes. Or try something different all together, like flyswatters, small hand brooms, hollow dowels. Experiment! Come up with some new sounds that nobody has before! It is important to remember that you don't want to damage the instrument, so check with your band instructor or teacher before trying out new techniques. And don't forget something even more important that your sticks - your hands!



And you don't have to stop there. You can place things on your drums and cymbals to come up with cool sound effect options. For example, you can put a chain on

your ride cymbal to make it sizzle, you can put some pop-off soda can tabs on a string and put it on your floor tom, or even put towels or blankets over your drums to make the snare extra snappy! A great example of this is on the album 'Abbey Road' by the Beatles. Ringo put a towel over his snare drum and recorded it the entire time!

The Moment You've All Been Waiting For

The drumset is no question, an All-American Instrument. Although it incorporates cymbals from Turkey, the Middle East and China, and often has other items such as Chinese woodblocks and toms, putting it all together was the product of New Orleans and its drummers and club owners. This is said to be because of two main reasons. First, bands in New Orleans with horns, guitars and such were becoming extremely popular a little after the turn of the century. The rhythm section usually consisted of drummers playing snare drum, bass drum, and cymbals each playing one instrument a piece. If it was a large band this could be up to ten or so drummers. There were often parades and street concerts, however there was a big problem when those

bands tried to play inside at clubs - there was no room! So what was the solution? Kick out a few members? Use less instruments? Well, it turns out, a little bit of both. Musicians cleverly came up with a way to situate the snare drum, bass drum, and some cymbals so that they could all be played by one musician. In time the drumset caught on and was used in Dixieland Jazz, Swing, Big Band, and eventually all the Rock, Alternative, and Hip-Hop that we listen to today. It is speculated that there is also another reason for one drummer instead of ten...the paycheck the club owner was handing out.

After learning some basics such as rudiments and basic grooves, it's time to put them on the drumset. As I have stated there are endless possibilities with the drumset using rudiments alone. By just changing what sound source you strike, such as a hi-hat with the right hand and snare drum with the left, adding a few accents and playing a parradiddle RLRR LRL, you come up with some really cool things.

Once you are comfortable with playing rudiments around the kit, you can change the stickings slightly to come up with your own rudiments. A drummer who is a master of this is David Garibaldi of the funk band Tower of Power.

Finally, you can take them and use more complex rudiments on various toms, drums, and cymbals to make up a really interesting solo. It just takes a little patience and practice - and the results will definitely come!

Final Thoughts

After years and years of playing, listening to, and immersing myself in a world of music



with so very many genres and so very many points of view, I have found some things work, and others do not. I believe it is extremely important to understand and culture oneself in various subjects that relate and connect to the playing, teaching, practicing, listening, and learning process of music, and in many regards, life itself. For me, music never fails to astound, surprise and inspire. Whether you choose a life based around music or choose music just as a hobby to have fun, I am sure it will be a worthwhile compliment to your life.

Playing an instrument is a lifelong rewarding process that requires and teaches discipline, respect, confidence, honesty, and honor. Practice hard, and Have Fun!!!

Vince M. Caiafa



Vince has been playing drums and percussion since age three. He attended The Hartt School of Music, studying under Benjamin Toth, with focus on Classical Percussion, Hand Drums, World Percussion and Marimba. He later transferred to Berklee

College of Music in Boston, MA where he studied under Kim Plainfield, Ralph Peterson, and Mike Mangini with a focus on drumset performance. It was in Boston where he began to teach and tutor privately. Upon returning to Connecticut his teaching has continued. Vince is an active drumset artist in the greater New England area. He is active in both playing live with various groups as well as being a studio recording artist. He currently teaches drumset and percussion at Music & Arts in East Hartford, CT and is available for both private and group instruction.

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