

The Journal of

PERCUSSION
PEDAGOGY

Volume 1, No. 1

October 2008

The Journal of Percussion Pedagogy

Vol. 1, No. 1
October 2008

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Cort A. McClaren

Welcome to The Journal of Percussion Pedagogy (JPP). I look forward to launching this journey of sharing information, expanding horizons, and enhancing communication through the JPP. Success of the Journal depends on the community of percussionist/musicians adopting a common goal of “making a difference.” May I encourage every reader to imagine the possibilities, set aside bias, and aim for a world where high school graduates are fluent readers, where musicianship is the supreme goal, where university teachers are prepared to deal with

better and better musicians, and where ideas that project us beyond the norm abound. Uninhibited communication has been the norm for the National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy since its inception. Now, via the JPP, we have another venue for expressing our ideas - Ideas that will form the future of teaching percussion.

You are cordially invited to join the discussion.

Cort McClaren

RUDIMENTS – AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Laura L. Franklin

When I was asked to write an article on “rudiments” for this publication I thought, “Are you kidding? Why are we still talking about this?” Why, indeed. As recently as April 2005, *Percussive Notes* devoted an issue largely to the discussion of rudiments. The cover of the issue read: “Rudiments Revisited: Were 26 enough? Are 40 too many? How about 80?” (*Percussive Notes*, vol. 43, no. 2, April 2005).

The fact that we even have to ask that question is symptomatic of a much larger problem concerning rudiments: As experts in our own field, we percussionists have failed miserably in our attempts to 1. Define what a rudiment is; 2. Describe the purpose of a rudiment; and 3. Express the proper place rudiments have in percussion study and performance. As a result, rudiments have taken on a life of their own apart from any rational methodology for teaching percussion, and have forced us to 1. Try to rationalize their very existence; 2. Invent increasing numbers of rudiments in attempt to ensure their relevance; or 3. Ignore them altogether. This article, then, is an attempt to start a discussion about the purpose and necessity of rudiments in our teaching and performance, and to present an alternative methodology for the study of percussion that may replace the traditional view of rudiments as the “scales and arpeggios” of our instrument.

What is a rudiment?

A *rudiment*, as defined by the American Heritage Dictionary, is, “1. A fundamental element, principle, or skill. 2. Something in an incipient or incompletely developed form.” These two definitions together express the idea of a rudiment as something that is basic, or elemental – a part of something larger, or the early stages of

something more complex. These non-musical definitions can help us arrive at a working definition that suits the purposes of this article. A rudiment should be something that is essential to the development of a higher level skill or essential to percussion playing and performance. Rudiments, then, are not in and of themselves higher-level skills; rather, they may be more simplistic or basic ideas that can be applied in increasingly complex musical situations.

A definition of a rudiment was presented by Haskel Harr. Harr, writing in *Percussive Notes* in 1979, took similar ideas into account when presenting his definition of a drum rudiment as: “...a fundamental rhythmic pattern which, when practiced diligently, will aid in developing a basic technique for playing the drum.” (PN, vol. 18 no. 1, 1979, p. 71)

I would propose as a working definition a slight revision of Harr’s: **A rudiment in percussion playing is a fundamental sticking pattern or skill set which will aid in developing a basic technique for musical performance on percussion instruments, specifically, the snare drum.** This definition allows for a broader view of ourselves as percussionists rather than “drummers” while retaining the idea of a rudiment as a basic or fundamental skill. The revised definition also highlights that which must be the paramount concern to all percussion performers and educators – playing music.

If we can agree on this definition of “rudiment,” we may begin to arrive at an understanding the proper purpose and place for study of rudiments in percussion performance.

Place of Rudiments in Percussion Study:

The 40 International Drum Rudiments, as they are published and disseminated presently, are mistakenly used or interpreted as a basic skill set or benchmark for all percussionists, regardless of personal goals or area of interest. And although those who are trained percussionists may intuitively know which rudiments are important to their particular area(s) of expertise or interest, having a list of 40 rudiments sanctioned by the professional organization of percussionists leads other educators (such as band directors) to think that these rudiments are all equally important to all students, and that mastery of each is essential to effective performance on percussion instruments. This is simply not the case. For almost every student, the study of rudiments as they are presently understood can be eliminated from the percussion curricula without any significant compromise in a student's ability to become a competent, professional musician.

Why are rudiments unnecessary in percussion study today? First, consider that rudiments originally served a military purpose. There were a small number of sticking patterns that were played to communicate specific commands across a battlefield. There were other rhythms or patterns that signaled events in a soldier's day outside of battle. Thus, simple, repetitive patterns were developed to serve those needs. Over time, these became more complicated and more numerous, requiring greater skill to execute them properly. In response to the desire of rudimental drummers to display their skills publicly, competitions were held in which the performance of rudiments comprised one adjudicated component. In 1932, as a result of a meeting of drummers during the American Legion National Convention, a list of rudiments, known as the Essential 13, were selected as a membership requirement for the Thirteen Club, organized by the

National Association of Rudimental Drumming.

Given this history, we can see that there is an historical significance to many of these rudiments. However, the educational and pedagogical significance of these rudiments is not as clear. Almost by accident, what began as a limited number of sticking patterns used on one instrument for a specific purpose became mistakenly regarded by most percussionists as a necessary part of our technical development. This is simply untrue. There are numerous ways to achieve technical proficiency as a percussionist that don't include study of the 40 International Drum Rudiments, but that will still result in the ability to play a rudimental snare solo, as well as an orchestral snare solo or a mallet or timpani piece, etc. One alternative to the traditional approach is presented here:

As educators, we can approach percussion teaching with one primary goal: Our students will be able to perform music at increasing levels of musical maturity and technical difficulty. To this end, we have two musical objectives that will help us achieve this over-arching goal: 1) The ability to read and interpret music at an increasingly high level; 2) The ability to recognize and shape a phrase within a given musical context. We also have two primary technical objectives that will help us meet this goal: 1) The equal development of both hands; 2) Control of the sticks or mallets at all tempi and dynamic levels.

In order for effective learning to take place, the student must have the opportunity to practice these objectives in a structured way. The teacher's responsibility, then, is to lay out a musical path for the student wherein these objectives are ordered simple to more complex, and to provide the appropriate information and guidance at the appropriate time in the student's development. The learning must be music-based, not

technique-based, in order for both the musical and the technical objectives to be met. In other words, technique is built in response to musical demands, not the other way around. The danger to a technique-first approach is that this may result in a player who is an impressive technician, but who lacks the type of musical skills necessary to be considered an impressive musician. The music then becomes subservient to the technique.

Granted, in order to begin to play any instrument, one must have some sort of basis for approaching that instrument. We may begin by teaching students how to hold their sticks, how and where to stand, how to adjust their instruments in relation to their bodies, and how to strike the drum. (A more complete discussion of this approach can be found in McClaren, Cort, *The Book of Percussion Pedagogy*, [C. Alan Publications, 2006].) Once the student has demonstrated an understanding of these fundamental concepts, the study of music should begin.

Purpose of Rudiments in Percussion Study:

As stated above, I believe that most rudiments are unnecessary to the development of a percussionist. However, they have existed as the “basis” of our technique for 75 years. What has their purpose been, and is there still any legitimate reason for their existence at present?

In Haskel Harr’s 1979 article concerning rudiments, he states, “Rudiments have long been a controversial subject among drummers and teachers, a controversy resulting from a lack of unified definition of the need and purpose for teaching rudiments.” (*Percussive Notes*, vol. 18 no1, 1979, p. 71) This statement is still true today: we do not have a clearly defined

purpose for teaching rudiments, or even for the existence of rudiments.

Three intended purposes for the development of rudiments have been put forth in the last 75 years. These include a descriptive purpose – describing the most common sticking patterns, a predictive purpose – predicting what snare drummers might encounter in the future; and a prescriptive purpose – prescribing to young snare drummers that which they need to practice to achieve minimum technical competency. However noble each of these stated purposes may be, they are not met and cannot be met by rudiments. Consider the following:

1) Purpose I: Descriptive: In 1932 the first list of The Essential 13 Rudiments was adopted by the National Association of Rudimental Drummers. Later, the same body adopted The Additional 13 Rudiments. These two lists together became known as The Standard 26 American Drum Rudiments. In 1984, the Percussive Arts Society further expanded the list, resulting in the 40 International Drum Rudiments. Each time the list was expanded, one of the implied goals was to catalogue the most common sticking patterns likely to be encountered in snare drum music. The list was supposed to be descriptive of the music most likely to be played by a percussionist.

Indeed, Haskel Harr, in the 1979 article cited above, makes reference to this very idea: “But [rudiments] do supply us with material for hand development and acquaint us with short rhythmic patterns which we may find in drum music.” Five years earlier, Dan Spalding also mentioned this idea in an article entitled “81 Drum Rudiments?” One purpose of the article was “...to introduce his [Spalding’s] Seven Essential and twelve most common auxiliary rudiments that he felt are the most common in drumming literature (both orchestra and rudimental)...” (*The Instrumentalist*, 1974, p. 22)

But if the rudiment list is supposed to be descriptive of the most common sticking combinations, who determines what is “most common?” And most common in what context? And most common at what point in time? Just because a sticking combination is deemed common by one group of people at a particular point in time does not mean that by learning that particular pattern, one’s musical skills will improve. So, while it may be worthwhile to preserve and document common sticking patterns at a particular point in our development, there is really no pedagogical purpose to this exercise.

2) Predictive: The crafters of this list wanted to devise a group of rudiments that would stand the test of time in terms of what a percussionist might need to know in order to function well on the snare drum. At one point before the adoption of the present list of 40, William F. Ludwig, Jr., stated to the committee, “So you have an awesome task which may well leave an imprint on the music world for 100 years or more.” (Quoted by Fred McInnis, “The History of the 40 International Drum Rudiments: 20 Years Later the Adoption Debate Continues,” *Percussive Notes*, April 2005, p. 25).

However, rudiments by their nature are short and very specific sticking patterns. The more complex music becomes, the more sticking combinations are encountered. As we know, there are an infinite number of stickings and combinations, along with an infinite number of ways to embellish such sticking patterns. The current list of 40 Rudiments represents a very small proportion of what a snare drummer will encounter in his or her playing career, and the list by its very nature is stagnant - it is not representative of the very real changes that happen in music over time. As such, their use is very limited and cannot truly be predictive.

3) Prescriptive: Another goal in revising the list of rudiments was to better technically prepare percussionists for what they might encounter in orchestral or rudimental music. On the surface this goal serves an educational purpose, but in reality, the list of rudiments has become very narrowly focused on music encountered by marching snare drummers.

Again, reviewing the history is valuable here: The first list of rudiments was developed by and for rudimental snare drummers. In addition, proponents of expanding the list of rudiments have historically come predominantly from the marching band or drum corps point of view. For example, the committee appointed in 1979 to oversee revision of the rudiment list was appointed by the PAS Marching Committee. Not surprisingly, rationale for revision at that time (c. 1979 – 1984) seemed to focus on the needs of those in the marching camp: Fred McInnis, in a 2005 *Percussive Notes* article, quotes Sherman Hong, a member of the PAS International Drum Rudiment Committee: “These revision discussions occurred to accommodate development in rudimental drumming caused by advances in playing and various patterns used by drum corps, tighter head tensioning – which allowed much more intricate patterns to be played – and orchestral snare playing advances.” (“The History of the 40 International Drum Rudiments: 20 Years Later the Adoption Debate Continues,” *Percussive Notes*, April 2005, p. 25). Presently, one of the leading arguments for expanding the list of rudiments is, according to McInnis, to reflect “...recent advances in rudimental drumming – particularly the further development of drum and bugle corps drumming.” (McInnis, p. 28) There are those now and in the history of the development of the list of rudiments who thought the list was too large or that there should only be 1-2 rudiments. However,

those in the marching band and drum corps fields have had undeniable sway over the development of this list, causing rudiments to be of little use as an educational tool for the percussionist. Even those not in the marching and drum corps camps have been guilty of failing to realize this present list of rudiments was not developed with the current needs of the percussionist in mind. Certainly band directors, who are responsible for the day-to-day training of young percussionists, do not understand how narrowly focused the list of rudiments really is.

The present list of 40 rudiments fails to achieve any of the goals that were intended: The list is not descriptive of what's really out there; rudiments are not predictive of the music one may encounter for the snare drum; and these sticking patterns are not a prescription for the adequate technical preparation of developing percussionists. Although we must have a method for the technical development of young percussionists, this method should be based on music, not rudiments.

Eliminating Rudiments: A Proposal

So where does that leave us? There are basic skills necessary to perform percussion music, but the current list of rudiments is far too narrowly focused on rudimental drumming. While a list of skills or patterns can be compiled that better serves the needs of all percussionists, the term "rudiment" has connotations that will not allow the focus to be where it should be: on the developing percussionist. Therefore, I believe a fundamental revision in how we think of "rudiments" in basic percussion study is needed. I propose a two-fold change:

First: Rudiments should be eliminated altogether from the curricula for developing percussionists. Instead, percussionists are to be aware of the

following basic skills. These skills should be taught within a comprehensive percussion curriculum that emphasizes music and musicianship. Although there might be some practice of these skills apart from the musical context, especially early in a percussionist's development, there should be no performance or adjudication of these skills apart from a musical context. These basic skills are as follows:

Alternating single stroke (all instruments)

–To play any percussion instrument, one needs to be able to execute even single strokes at all tempi and dynamic levels. This is the basis for all percussion playing.

Open and Closed Rolls (primarily snare drum) – To sustain sound on a snare drum, one needs to be able to perform a roll. Depending upon the style of music, a roll may be open or closed. Percussionists should have a working knowledge of the concept of roll base and how tempi and dynamics affect roll base. With this knowledge, performance practice, experience and guidance, a percussionist will know when to interpret a roll as closed or open and will be able to choose the correct roll base for the given dynamic level and tempo. (N.B. it is not necessary for a percussionist to be able to name a roll in terms of the number of times the stick hits the drum, e.g. a 7-stroke roll or a 5-stroke roll, if he or she has an understanding of roll base.)

Embellishments: This includes the flam or single grace notes and drags or ruffs.

Flams: One will encounter a single grace note followed by a main note primarily on snare drum (where it is called a flam) and in keyboard percussion music (where it is called a grace note). In both situations, there is a single grace note which will be played more softly than the main note, regardless of the dynamic of the passage. An understanding of how to execute a flam or grace note at a variety of dynamic levels is

necessary for musical performance on all percussion instruments. *Drags/Ruffs*: The player should be able to perform these both with the grace notes open and with the grace notes closed at all dynamic levels.

Everything else a player will encounter in music is a combination of single strokes, embellishments and rolls. When, in a piece of music, a student encounters a passage that may present him or her with some difficulty, the teacher can guide the student by simply isolating the passage, having the student practice it slowly a number of times using a variety of stickings and dynamic levels, and then placing it back into the musical context. In this manner, instead of relying on a finite number of sticking patterns that cannot possibly cover all possible combinations, the student is addressing technical concerns through a musical approach. (A more complete discussion of this approach can be found in McClaren, Cort, *The Book of Percussion Pedagogy*, [C. Alan Publications, 2006] p. 48.)

Second: The numerous sticking patterns known as Rudiments shall be relegated for use by marching snare drum players, in keeping with their historical purpose and present focus. It should be understood, however, that rudiments are not necessary for the development of any percussionist, even one primarily interested in playing the marching snare drum. Further, undue focus on the practice and perfection of such a limited number of sticking patterns to the detriment of other areas will result in a player with limited musical abilities.

A limited number of sticking patterns, whether 26, 40, or even 80, cannot possibly adequately prepare a well-rounded percussionist for all the technical and musical challenges that he or she will encounter. Since the original rudiments were identified and named in 1932, the field of percussion has become more complex and dynamic than anyone at that time could have

predicted. In addition, the understanding of a limited number of basic skills (as proposed above), while important, should not form the sole basis for percussion study. Instead, we need to acknowledge that our field is evolving daily; the musical and technical expectations of today's percussionists far exceed those placed on percussionists even 20 years ago. To face these demands, we need to use a music-based approach to train and cultivate musicians who are creative and flexible; who have musical sensibility and technical agility; and who are not bogged down or boxed in by the limited technical skills that have been deemed important in the past. Our field has evolved. It is time that our thinking about the field evolves as well.

Laura Franklin teaches applied percussion, percussion ensemble, and world music at Brevard College. She received a B.M. in Performance, from Texas Tech University, the M.M. in Performance and Musicology from the New England Conservatory, and the D.M.A. in Performance from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. Dr. Franklin has presented concerts, clinics and lectures nationally, including sessions at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC), National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy (NCPD), and North Carolina Music Educators Conference. She performs in the Asheville and Hendersonville Symphony Orchestras and a frequent performer with Mountain Chamber Players. Laura is the former Chair of the Percussive Arts Society (PAS) Scholarly Research Committee, on the Board of Directors for the National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy, and President of the North Carolina Chapter of PAS.

RETHINKING A PEDAGOGY OF BEGINNING FOUR-MALLET TECHNIQUE

Kathleen Kastner

In my 35 years of percussion teaching, I have had the opportunity to teach a variety of students, at different ages, levels of playing and on a variety of percussion instruments. When I first began teaching college students in the seventies, there were many students who had little exposure to four-mallet marimba playing and thus teaching included more of the basics even at the college level. Even today, some of my college percussion majors come in with minimal experience playing four-mallets, in spite of the fact that they have some good skills in other facets of percussion.

The Challenge

In both private teaching and clinic sessions, I have come across the experience of a high school percussionist who is/was asked to play a four-mallet part in band, with little more than the instruction from the band director, “Here is how you hold the mallets and here is the music for you to learn.” Now this is not an indictment of the band directors, for they have so many details to oversee and there is woefully little time for them to accomplish all the challenges that daily confront them. Often, it is the lack of time and one-on-one instruction that keeps the details from finding a solid home in the student’s technique.

Confronted with this dilemma over the years, I have come to consider the pedagogy of beginning four-mallet technique as being comparable to the training one must undertake for a marathon, in terms of muscle strengthening and endurance. The difference in the comparison of these two endeavors however, is that marimbists need to strengthen the small muscles of the hand and fingers; I often use the analogy of weight-

training for the hands and fingers, as my students generally understand that concept.

An Overview

With this analogy in mind, I developed a progressive series of exercises to accomplish the goal of strengthening the small muscles of the hand and fingers that are involved with four-mallet marimba playing. These exercises are applicable to a Stevens or Musser grip. Typically it takes four to six weeks of these exercises, practiced concurrently with the student’s study of two-mallet exercises and repertoire, to develop the strength to successfully tackle the beginning or intermediate four-mallet repertoire (the level dependent on the student’s reading skills).

I have used this approach for more than two decades of working with high school and college students who have little or no background in four-mallet playing and I am convinced that this focus on developing hand and finger strength, without the distraction of learning notes, offers an efficient and solid approach to four-mallet playing. Furthermore, this method also helps the student become more aware of muscle tension in the arms, hands and fingers, which in turn allows for a more healthy, pain-free experience.

The Method

Week One

In the first week, I instruct the student to practice arpeggios using only the outside mallets (mallets 1 and 4 in a 1-2-3-4 numbering system from low to high). The two mallets are held between the third and fourth fingers, loosely held in place by the fourth and fifth fingers. The thumb and

index finger loosely touch each other and are to remain completely relaxed.



I have the students practice arpeggios because there is some space between the notes and because they are familiar with one-octave major arpeggios, as I emphasize these in their two-mallet study. Because the students know their major arpeggios, they don't have to think about the notes, which is helpful since the aim with the outside mallets is slightly off from what they are used to experiencing. I emphasize to the student that accuracy is not the most important goal. Rather getting used to the feeling of these "foreign" mallets in the outside position is of primary importance, along with staying relaxed while still being able to control the mallets.

The students are instructed to practice with the outside mallets for 15-20 minutes a day, but in three to four increments of five minutes each. I caution all of my students about the possibility of their skin being irritated and/or the formation of blisters because of the contact of the mallet with the formerly untouched area of the fingers. I have found that typically, the students that have fingers with a little more muscle around their bones, generally will only have a slight irritation (a reddening of the skin), while those students with little muscle on their fingers ("skinny" fingers) seem to be more prone to the development of blisters. The goal, of course, is to develop a callous,

but this takes time and a lot of practice. Thus, this early stage of callous development can be frustrating if students are not observant of the condition of their skin on the middle finger. I encourage students to use a band-aid when there is a blister forming so the blister does not break, as that will set them back a bit due to the pain. I have found that after the first couple weeks, this issue of skin irritation diminishes in most students - and it should be noted that I have had many students where this has never been an issue.

One other related issue is important to acknowledge: my approach to mallet choice – that is, the use of rattan or birch – is a decision I leave up to the preferences of my students. I have learned over the years that students have different levels of comfort with birch and rattan. However, in this process of practicing with the outside mallets, I ask the students if they have any pain or if their fingers hurt in any way (some of them readily volunteer this information). On occasion, a student (often one with "skinny" fingers) has noted that there is some pain against the bone and I will suggest that the student try rattan mallets, as there is more flexibility in the rattan and the bone might not become quite as irritated as a result.

Week Two

At the student's next lesson, after addressing the two-mallet material, I allow about 30 minutes to address the student's four-mallet technique. We review the outside mallet experience of the previous week's practice and I have the student play several minutes with the outside mallets to make sure that there is no tension and to confirm the student's comfort with the outside mallets.

The next step is to demonstrate the complete grip and have the students add the inside mallets to the outside mallets. I have the student do this one hand at a time, beginning with the dominant hand. In my teaching, I

have always affirmed the ability of the dominant hand to be a model for the non-dominant hand, particularly when it comes to learning new aspects of technique. If the dominant hand can more naturally grasp a new concept the non-dominant hand has a “resident” model, which is far more effective than just watching a teacher demonstrate it, as important as that is.

Once the grip in the dominant hand feels somewhat secure, then I ask the student to find the most comfortable interval (staying on the natural “white” notes in the middle octave of a five octave instrument). Typically a third or fourth is chosen; this often is related to the size of the hand. I find that taller students with larger hands tend to find the fourth a more comfortable interval and the students with smaller hands gravitate towards the third. Only once in all my years of teaching can I remember a student who felt the second was most natural and comfortable initially and likewise, only one student felt the fifth was most comfortable on the first try. This procedure is then repeated in the non-dominant hand; occasionally, a student will choose a different interval for each hand because each hand has a different level of comfort. No matter what the choice, the emphasis should be on what feels most comfortable and natural.



Once the comfortable interval is chosen for each hand, the assignment for the next week’s practice is to practice the interval(s) up and down a one octave scale, staying on the naturals in the middle octave of a five-octave instrument. I instruct the student to stay in that octave because there is minimal change in interval size within one octave and a stable distance is important in this initial stage. Once again, I instruct the student to practice this material, evenly dividing the time between hands, 15-20 minutes a day, but in three to four increments of five minutes each.

Week Three and Beyond

After listening and watching the student play the initial comfortable interval(s), we proceed to choose the next comfortable interval size for each hand. It is interesting to see how much stronger the student’s muscle strength is even after only practicing one week as the intervals that were awkward just a week earlier can be more easily negotiated. The practice procedure described above is repeated for the week and the process continues, adding a new interval for the next two weeks.

This beginning process of adding an interval continues only until the student can play a second, third, fourth and fifth comfortably. It should be noted that sometimes a student is not ready to move on to a new interval in one hand or both on any given week so the overall process may take longer than six weeks.

Once the student can negotiate either a second, third and fourth or a third, fourth and fifth, I have the student begin to do some exercises that involve changing the interval.

Beginning Exercise: 3rds, 4ths and 5ths



Beginning Exercise: 2nds, 3rds and 4ths



Also, when the student has secured a solid third in the left hand and a fourth in the right hand, I introduce the concept of playing major chords up and down an octave (C-E-G-C-bottom to top). This is expanded when the student can master a fifth in the left hand and play the C-G-C-E (bottom to top) and move up and down the octave. Other chords and inversions can be added as the student's control of intervals expands.

Once a student has mastered the basic intervals, I introduce an easy four mallet piece, often chosen from the following: Gomez/Rife: *Rain Dance* (the measures at the end of the rolled section may need to be re-voiced for those who cannot reach an octave or ninth); the three- and four-mallet movements of the Pitfield *Sonata*, or one of the Zivkovic *Funny Marimba* early pieces. In the process of learning appropriate four-mallet repertoire, when the need for mastery of the intervals of a 6th, 7th or octave arises, the student is often ready as the strength and flexibility of his or her grip grows with the completion of a progressive repertoire.

It should be noted that as the student progresses with her or his four-mallet development, other technical issues are naturally addressed: incorporation of the chromatic notes, rolling four-mallet chords, and beginning hand-to-hand independence exercises (1-3-2-4; 4-2-3-1; 1-4-2-3 and 2-3-1-4 and others). I often use Mitchell Peters' *Yellow After the Rain*, which provides a veritable catalog of all the beginning four-mallet techniques.

From this solid foundation, combined with regular and disciplined practice, appropriate repertoire and method book, a student will continue to strengthen the muscles of the hands and fingers, resulting in an increasing level of four-mallet performance.

Kathleen Kastner is Professor of Percussion, teaches percussion, as well as twentieth century music history and world music at Wheaton College. As Wheaton's first resident percussion teacher, she founded the Percussion Ensemble in the fall of 1972. She received her doctorate from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she studied with Thomas Siwe. Dr. Kastner has been involved in the Percussive Arts Society for many years, having previously served as a member of the Board of Directors, associate editor for research of *Percussive Notes*, chair of the Scholarly Research Committee, PAS historian, and Illinois State Chapter President.

REACHING CONSENSUS

Cort A. McClaren

Teachers and learners encounter new challenges, novel approaches, and sometimes-conflicting information every day. Teachers make decisions about curriculum. Learners develop filters allowing select information to penetrate while excluding other bits of knowledge. This dance of cerebral agility is regulated by something called insight. **Insight** is the quality of having a deep understanding of something, as of a complex problem or situation. The depth of insight one brings to an issue is dependent on experience, interest, and desire to learn.

Ever wonder why some students “get it” and others do not? Ask the same question about teachers, “why do some teachers “get it” and others do not?” When simultaneously exposed to identical information, members of a group will extract different information, since each person has different experiences and goals. Varying experience yields different results. To illustrate the point, consider the following question?

Question:

Which grip is best for beginning percussionists: traditional or matched?

Answer(s):

1. I think we can focus this discussion simply by getting clear about what “best” means.
2. Let the band director or percussion teacher decide which grip to start their students on.
3. Not to teach traditional grip to young students would be a travesty.
4. Bottom line – traditional makes absolutely no logical sense.

5. From a teacher’s perspective, the matched grip is more utilitarian, easier to teach, quicker to transfer.
6. I still think that there is a value in saying there is a particular way of playing that is logical and truly reflective of how the body works.
7. It seems obvious that both grips need explanation for different musical applications. I play and teach both grips as I feel they both have their place in the drum set world.

So, what is the answer – which grip is best for beginning percussionists? The answer depends on a person’s insight, i.e. the quality of having a deep understanding of the issue. The fictitious characters that provided answers applied different standards to the question. Each believes he/she is correct.

It is no surprise that noticeable diversity exists in the percussion community. Furthermore, the disparate groups generally do not communicate with one another. When the technical revolution of the 1970’s altered our perspective, a splintering occurred resulting in the emergence of specialization. Drum set styles increased, clearly defined marimba technique opened a new paradigm of potential, percussion ensemble and solo literature exploded, marching percussion began an unprecedented transition, steel drumming arrived, forms of ethnic drumming began to impact the percussion scene, and manufacturers and publishers jumped on the bandwagon of possibilities.

Life before the mid 1970's was simple compared to the complex array of ideas kaleidoscoping through the channels of communication today. A percussionist played traditional orchestra instruments, maybe a little drum set, and limited marimba. Although many percussionists teach general techniques today, they often have special interests that dictate their interest in learning about "other" aspects of the percussion world. Each specialty has its peculiar way of operating. For example, if an individual is primarily a snare drum specialist with a life goal of playing in an orchestra percussion section, without concerted effort to learn pedagogical approaches to other instruments, he/she might conceivably demonstrate limited or outdated knowledge and subsequent insight into broader aspects of percussion. Is this imaginary person more likely to produce percussionists that play in concert bands/orchestras, or will this person develop musicians capable of operating within a wide variety of musical settings including solo performance? Will this individual view student progress solely on the basis of snare drum performance? Will personal goals limit his/her scope of inquiry and subsequent learning? If so, why? The same idea might find credence when viewing any specialty.

The scenario given above may vary, but the underlying premise is the same. **Learning is a result of goal-seeking behavior.**

In direct conflict with the tendency toward specialization is a notion born in the 1970's suggesting that all teachers should develop "total" percussionists. Total Percussion was a marketing scheme of manufacturers as an effort to sell more instruments. "*Convince them that all students should play all instruments and they will buy more, more, more.*" Pedagogues jumped on the bandwagon without adequate materials, methodology, and means for achieving demonstrative results. Incidentally, twenty

to thirty years later, a large number of students graduated from high school still lacking even modest skills to confidently play in a community band. Conversely, some students demonstrated performance skills beyond our wildest dreams. Why the disparity?

The incredible diversity in the percussion community is evident when examining graduate courses in percussion pedagogy. Consider two broad-based outlines for such a course.

Graduate Pedagogy Course No. 1

1. Study of perception and concept development.
2. In-depth discussion of evaluation models.
3. Thorough analysis of all class percussion texts.
4. Influence of history on pedagogical approaches.
5. Relationships among literature, instrument development, and performance techniques.
6. Sequential curriculum applied to percussion.
7. Stages of Learning applied to percussion.
8. Techniques of reinforcement applied to teaching percussion.

Graduate Pedagogy Course No. 2

1. Snare drum grip
2. Importance of fulcrum
3. Basics of drum set and how to apply information to young drummers.
4. How to take an audition
5. Review snare drum methods
6. Review timpani methods
7. How to prepare for a recital
8. How to start a steel band

Each graduate pedagogy course above claims important information. However, the course outlines illustrate different approaches from individuals with different experiences. Question: With whom do you

wish to study? Which course better prepares today's percussion teacher? The teachers in this scenario will most likely select different marimba literature, different timpani literature, and different percussion ensemble literature for their programs. The teachers will likely impose varying importance on learning upper-level marimba literature, high-level percussion ensemble literature, on learning orchestral excerpts, on studying drum set, on keeping up with current trends or on relying on the past as a primary focus.

We find ourselves in a complex world of opposing alternatives: specialty vs. specialty, total percussion vs. up-to-date information, matched vs. traditional, to steel band vs. not to steel band, and so on, and so on. Our insight, or, the information that we bring to a situation, is based on our personal goals and experiences. Since our experiences are different, reaching consensus on critical issues presents enormous challenges. I am often amused when a "famous" percussionist attempts to make significant decisions about teaching young players. Why are we so surprised when the attempt so often fails? Because, interest in a subject must always have a solid foundation in the type of experience under scrutiny in order to achieve ultimate success.

Reaching consensus in our world of endless possibilities may be an unreachable dream. The idea of a unified group of single-minded individuals that band together for the common good does not exist at this point - that is, when considering the global community of percussionists. However, the disturbing barrage of opinions formed by each individual's background and experience can be addressed via appropriate communication. We can seek to open lines of communication and share critical information in efforts to expose students to a broader perspective. THEY will determine the future.

By the way, matched grip is the best!

Dr. Cort McClaren is the former Director of Percussion Studies at the University of North Carolina, President of C. Alan Publications, and Director of The National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy. Dr. McClaren frequently appears at music educators' conventions, presenting clinics on his "Common Elements" approach to teaching percussion. His innovative approach is evident in his book The Book of Percussion Pedagogy and the Book of Percussion Audition Music. He earned the Bachelor and Masters degree from Wichita State University and the Ph.D. from The University of Oklahoma.