

## Introduction

RUSSELL HARTENBERGER

The *Cambridge Companion to Percussion* is a collection of articles that discuss issues relating to percussion and rhythm from the perspectives of performers, composers, conductors, instrument builders, scholars, and cognitive scientists. It is intended to be a companion to percussionists in their study and performance and an accompaniment to those who want a deeper understanding of percussion music and the rhythmic aspects that are embodied within it.

The *Companion* is not a historical documentation of percussion or an encyclopedia of instruments, terms, or usages. There are several excellent books and a growing number of journal articles and dissertations in these areas. It is also not a book on percussion technique, although the authors, all notable percussionists and percussionist/scholars, provide enlightened perspectives on performance issues. However, it is a valuable resource for students, amateurs, or professionals who seek insight into topics related to rhythm and percussion from experts in the field.

The percussion sphere is vast and worthy of a separate *Companion* in any of its areas. Consequently, for this volume I have chosen topics that will, hopefully, have wide interest and appeal and are from the points of view of Western-trained percussionists. The chapters are all written by percussionists whose backgrounds represent the range of interests commensurate with the breadth of the world of percussion.

The book is organized in broad areas, although there are overlaps throughout. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the traditions of orchestral timpani and percussion from a historical perspective and also with a view to the future. Chapter 1 traces some of the “schools” of timpani playing that originated in European cities and have had an impact on percussion practice throughout the world. In Chapter 2, William L. Cahn, long-serving principal percussionist in the Rochester Philharmonic and later a member of its Board of Directors, cites issues that confront orchestral percussionists in the twenty-first century and possible solutions for them to consider.

Chapters 3–6 examine the development of percussion instruments and literature. In Chapter 3, marimba soloist and historian William Moersch writes about the rapid growth of interest in marimba and other mallet percussion instruments. The compositions, performers, and composers

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listed in this chapter provide an extraordinary overview of the evolution of mallet instrument repertoire. In Chapter 4, percussionist and instrument builder Garry Kvistad analyzes the acoustical properties of percussion instruments and explains the value of this knowledge for percussionists. In Chapter 5, Rick Mattingly, Senior Publications Editor of the journal, *Percussive Notes*, provides insight into the percussion industry and the cross-over between manufacturers and performers. And in Chapter 6, scholar, composer, and Broadway percussionist Thomas Brett documents the history of drum machines and their effects on percussion and music in general.

Chapters 7–10 discuss percussion in performance areas that have emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In Chapter 7, Adam Sliwinski, a member of Sō Percussion, looks at the percussion ensemble repertoire as chamber music from the early works of John Cage through the influential compositions of Steve Reich. Solo percussion performance is a relatively new phenomenon, and in Chapter 8, acclaimed soloist Colin Currie describes the solo and concerto repertoire for percussion while providing insight into the role of the percussion soloist. There is drama in the act of percussion performance, and in Chapter 9, Aiyun Huang, winner of First Prize and the Audience Award in the Geneva International Music Competition in 2002, describes the formalization of percussion theater through recent compositions. Percussionists often find themselves in the role of conductor, either formally or informally, and in Chapter 10, esteemed percussion soloist Steven Schick describes the challenges he faced in undergoing the transformation from professional percussionist to orchestral conductor.

In Chapters 11–13, three percussionist/composers describe their individual approaches to writing music for percussion and the concerns and issues that they have confronted in writing music in this idiom. Chapters 11 and 12 provide insight into the compositional styles of Bob Becker and Jason Treuting, two of the leading percussionist/composers of our time. There are many references throughout this book to the music and influence of composer/percussionist, Steve Reich. Chapter 13 is a collection of thoughts on percussion and rhythmic usage in Reich's music by the composer himself.

Three views of drum set playing are discussed in Chapters 14–16. In Chapter 14, legendary drummer Peter Erskine explains the elusive term “groove” and how drum set players achieve this feeling. In Chapter 15, Steven F. Pond, author of the award-winning book, *Headhunters, the Making of Jazz's First Platinum Album*, examines funk drumming through the frequently sampled drum break of Clyde Stubblefield. Drum set player and scholar Jeff Packman, in Chapter 16, describes technological

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developments in the drum set itself, and the impact these changes have had on jazz and popular music.

Music played on percussion instruments is both the oldest and youngest of musical genres. The tradition of percussion exists in most countries in the world and has been a part of musical culture for as long as we know. The merger of these instruments and musical ideas has had a significant impact on contemporary Western percussion performance and is examined in Chapters 17–19. Chapter 17 is a conversation with the great *mrdangam* virtuoso from South India, Trichy Sankaran, and his daughter Suba Sankaran, both of whom have found ways to combine Indian and Western musical traditions. In Chapter 18, *mbira* player and African percussion pedagogue B. Michael William provides an overview of the influence of music from the African diaspora on many forms of music in the Western Hemisphere. In Chapter 19, percussionist/scholar Michael B. Bakan looks at the connections between percussion ensemble and Balinese gamelan and provides insight into a style of gamelan that uses only percussion instruments.

The perception of rhythm by humans is a relatively recent area of research by cognitive scientists. In Chapters 20 and 21, two percussionist/scientists look at some of the laboratory work that affects the way percussionists play their instruments and think about rhythms. In Chapter 20, Michael Schutz discusses the research on movement relevant to percussionists and focuses on those gestures that lack acoustical consequences. Chapter 21 concludes *The Cambridge Companion to Percussion* by bringing us back to the beginning of our relationship with rhythm in a discussion by John R. Iversen on the evolutionary origins of musical rhythm in humans.

My hope in presenting this volume is that it is representative of the growing significance of percussion and rhythm in Western music. Using the mantra of my first percussion teacher, Alan Abel, who instructed me to “follow the line” of the music, I encourage all readers who are inspired by the articles in this book to follow the many lines of percussion that lead to innovations in instrument development, composition, performance techniques, rhythmic ideas, and scientific research into future worlds heretofore unimagined.

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PART ONE

**Orchestral percussion**

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## 1 Timpani traditions and beyond

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One whose insight is the same as his teacher's lacks half of his teacher's power. Only one whose insight surpasses his teacher's is worthy to be his heir.<sup>1</sup> LINJI YIXUAN (D. 866)

Timpani, or kettledrums, were the first percussion instruments to be included in the classical symphony orchestra, and the musicians who were called upon to play them were often string players, wind players, or, on occasion, singers. As composers wrote more complex parts for timpani, these newly minted timpanists began to create individual techniques based on their instruments, orchestra, repertoire, conductor, concert hall, and sociocultural environment. The players adapted to all these factors in creating individual approaches to sound production and musicality, and in doing so, became progenitors of the first schools of percussion. Orchestras in European cities spawned lineages of timpani players that, in some cases, still maintain links to their early timpanists through continuous teacher–student associations.

The first orchestral timpanists had no historical precedent for their playing techniques; the interpretation of their parts was based on their innate musicality combined with their imagination. As these musicians began to teach others the art of timpani playing, the techniques they developed became codified and, as time went on, even ossified as young players attempted to replicate the styles of their teachers. The timpanists who became the most influential were the ones who honored their teacher's precepts but responded to the changing musical environment by incorporating new ideas into their fundamental techniques. And as evolving generations of timpanists migrated beyond Europe creating family trees with branches extending in many directions, a cross-fertilization began to take place that enriched the use of percussion in Western musical traditions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, orchestras were forming in major North American cities, and musicians from Europe were hired to fill many of the principal positions. The timpanists who arrived brought their traditions to their new orchestras but gradually modified them to accommodate orchestras with amalgamated groups of musicians playing in venues with different acoustics from the great concert halls in Europe. As percussion instruments gradually became

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more commonly used in orchestras, the focus of timpani schools, in both Europe and North America, expanded to include snare drum, xylophone, glockenspiel, cymbals, and percussion accessories such as tambourine and triangle. Then, with the advent of recordings, theater orchestras, jazz and other forms of popular music, and later, compositions for solo percussion instruments and percussion/chamber ensembles, percussionists had career options beyond symphony orchestras. As a consequence, timpani became but one of many areas of focus for young players. Timpani styles began to merge as generations of percussionists moved from place to place and as creative players adapted to concert halls, new instrument designs, and diverse repertoire. However, the basic approaches to making a musical sound and interpreting a phrase that began with European timpanists continued to be valid and are still used by timpanists and percussionists today. One of the most intriguing stories of a European timpani tradition that found its way to North America and propagated an extended timpani and percussion lineage began in Leipzig, Germany.

### **Ernst Pfundt**

Ernst Gotthold Benjamin Pfundt (1806–1871) had some training on a variety of instruments, including timpani, in his youth, but he was a choral director, tenor soloist, and piano teacher when, in 1836, he was called upon to play timpani in the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. According to timpani scholar Edmund A. Bowles, the orchestra's conductor, Felix Mendelssohn, "became dissatisfied with the timpanist, Friedrich August Grenser (who doubled on second violin, a common practice in those days). During a rehearsal, Grenser had so badly bungled the drum and piano solo in the concluding moments of Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto that Mendelssohn . . . immediately hired Pfundt as a temporary replacement, who then performed so well that he earned Mendelssohn's everlasting gratitude." Pfundt became "arguably the most famous kettledrummer of his generation," and "wrote one of the very first instruction manuals for the instrument, thus establishing one of the first 'schools' of timpani playing."<sup>2</sup> Pfundt seems to have been a consummate musician from a musical background; he was the son of a singer, and nephew to Friederich Wieck, the father of Clara (later Schumann).<sup>3</sup> We can only speculate that, when Grenser "bungled" the timpani part to the Emperor Concerto, Pfundt was able to transfer his musical sensibility from singing and playing other instruments to timpani.



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Figure 1.1 Drawing of Ernst Pfundt by Carl Reimers.

### **Alfred Frieze; Saul Goodman**

The legacy of Pfundt and the school of timpanists in the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra that followed him extends to some of the early timpani players in orchestras in North America. Alfred Frieze was a violist in the Gewandhaus Orchestra who became interested in timpani and studied with Hermann Gustav Schmidt (1857–1926), the Leipzig timpanist from 1893–1923.<sup>4</sup> Frieze earned a position as timpanist in the Winderstein Orchestra in Leipzig and later moved to the United States where he was

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timpanist in the Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, and the New York Philharmonic. It was in New York that Friese taught Saul Goodman, who eventually succeeded him as timpanist in the New York Philharmonic and played there from 1926 to 1972.<sup>5</sup> Even though Goodman studied with the Leipzig-trained Friese, he credits a German from Dresden, Oscar Schwar, with giving him important advice about timpani playing.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my dear friend and mentor, Oscar Schwar, the celebrated and unique timpanist of the Philadelphia Orchestra who died in 1945. Back in the late 1920s, I used to meet him every time the Philadelphia Orchestra came to New York City. Schwar had the most beautiful tone of any timpanist I have ever heard. With the encouragement and cooperation of Leopold Stokowski, he achieved tone colors from the timpani never heard before. He knew how to care for the instrument and how to keep it up to the highest state of perfection in order to produce the best results. In my many conversations with him, especially over a glass of beer, I learned much about these details that are so important for the timpanist.<sup>6</sup>

Goodman developed his own style of playing through his lessons and advice from Friese and Schwar, and also by playing from a position on stage at Carnegie Hall that Alan Abel describes as a “hot spot.”<sup>7</sup> From this acoustically live site, his sound projected into the hall with clarity and authority. Anthony J. Cirone, who studied with Goodman at the Juilliard School, says Goodman “constantly reminded his students about three important considerations when performing: precision, sensitivity, and musicality.”<sup>8</sup> Students of the “Goodman school,” sometimes referred to as the “New York school,” occupy numerous timpani and percussion positions in orchestras throughout the world, and the legacy of Goodman’s teaching still echoes from his “hot spot.”

### **Oscar Schwar; Cloyd Duff**

Oscar Schwar, who Goodman acknowledges as a mentor, studied violin as a boy in Bautzen, Saxony, and entered the Royal Conservatory of Dresden as a violinist. He switched to timpani and studied with Herr Heinemann, timpanist at the Dresden Royal Opera. After finishing his schooling, Schwar served as timpanist in orchestras in Finland and Russia before moving to the United States where he was timpanist in the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1903 until his death in 1946. He was the first percussion teacher at the newly created Curtis Institute of Music when it opened in 1924. One of Schwar’s students at Curtis was Cloyd Duff, who became timpanist in the Cleveland Orchestra in 1942 and played there until his