

## Introduction

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Welcome to the *Cambridge Companion to the Drum Kit*. We are delighted to share this first of its kind text, an edited volume dedicated solely to scholarly consideration of the drum kit. This brief introduction to the *Companion* provides background on the work's origins, discussion of its potential import, an explanation of the volume's organization, introductions to the individual authors and chapters, and suggestions for how readers might use the text.

The *Cambridge Companion to the Drum Kit* has its origins in a collegial meeting at the 2016 Association for Popular Music Education conference in Boston, Massachusetts. Two of the editors, Daniel Akira Stadnicki and Joseph Michael Pignato, were enjoying a post-conference dinner with one of the contributing authors, Gareth Dylan Smith, all three avid drummers. The trio's discussion inevitably turned to drumming, the drum kit itself, and to the names of other drummers, scholars, and practitioners with similar interests.

Throughout the course of the conversation, a variety of fields, representing a wide swath of scholarship, drumming practices, and perspectives came to the fore. We recognized that the drum kit remains a remarkably underrepresented topic in music research despite growing interests in rhythmic and percussive phenomena across the humanities and social sciences. This interest includes significant studies and networks dedicated to understanding the dynamics of rhythm, groove, micro-timing, and entrainment. It dawned on the three that something was bubbling under the radar of existing conferences, established journals, and widely read texts, an emerging community of scholars concerned with the drum kit, the drummers who play them, and related issues.

This emerging community represents what Pignato has referred to as a 'community of response', or the gathering, intentional or by chance, of subcultural groups in response to a particular phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> According to Pignato, communities of response represent 'requisite first steps' to Lave and Wenger's 'communities of practice' and are worth noting because they often presage emerging movements, endeavours, or fields of activity.<sup>2</sup> This text then seeks to acknowledge that community of response, essentially to

[1]

## 2 M. Brennan, J. Michael Pignato, and D. Akira Stadnicki

say, 'here it is. It is indeed a phenomenon unto itself, worthy of scholarly consideration'. By the time the ideas above reached the stage of a book proposal, Matt Brennan joined to round out the editorial team, and together they curated a collection of chapters that provides background on the drum kit as an historical phenomenon, identifies some nascent scholarship, and considers contemporary issues pertaining to drum kits and the drummers who play them. Authors contributing to this volume represent scholars, practitioners, and historically noted drummers hailing from four continents, North America, South America, Europe, and Australia.

The volume is organized in five discrete but connected parts: Part I, 'Histories of the Drum Kit', Part II: 'Analysing the Drum Kit in Performance', Part III: 'Learning, Teaching, and Leading on the Drum Kit', and Part IV: 'Drumming Bodies, Meaning, and Identity'. Each is highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs.

Part I, 'Histories of the Drum Kit', provides historical grounding for the text. Matt Brennan lays the foundation for Part I, and for the subsequent parts, offering historical and theoretical consideration of the drum kit. Paul Archibald considers how early sound recordings informed drumming practice and drummers' understanding of the instrument and its roles in bands and orchestras. Steven Baur considers the cultural history of the drum kit backbeat in sound recordings from the early twentieth century. Finally, Pedro Ojeda Acosta and Juan David Rubio Restrepo chronicle the drum kit in an historically specific application, that of Colombia's *Música Tropical Sabanera*.

Accordingly, Part II, 'Analysing the Drum Kit in Performance', considers specific and situated applications of the drum kit. Part II begins with an historically and geographically specific consideration, Daniel Gohn's history of the drum kit in Brazilian folkloric, popular, and jazz music. Ben Reimer highlights the ways in which the drum kit has been incorporated in contemporary classical music. Scott Hanenberg considers the increasingly complex approaches to meter and irregular rhythms present in contemporary drum kit performance. Daniel Akira Stadnicki provides a case study of drum kit aesthetics in the musical genre known as *Americana*. Part II ends with Brett Lashua and Paul Thompson's look at drum kits and drumming in contemporary recording contexts.

Part III, 'Learning, Teaching, and Leading on the Drum Kit', focuses on the ways in which drummers learn, teach, mentor, and lead from behind the drum kit. Bryden Stillie examines ways in which his students adapt to and learn from and with technologically augmented and hybrid drum kits. Carlos Xavier Rodriguez and Patrick Hernly examine timekeeping, often considered a perfunctory function of drum kit performance, through the

### 3 Introduction

lens of aesthetics. Joseph Michael Pignato engages jazz drummers Jack DeJohnette and Terri Lyne Carrington in a discussion of mentorship within jazz drumming tradition and culture. Finally, Bill Bruford considers leading from behind the kit, both the physical spaces behind the battery of drums and cymbals, as part of the backline, and from the conceptual space drummers occupy in music and in popular culture.

The final section, Part IV, 'Drumming Bodies, Meaning, and Identity', provides a capstone of meta-analyses of broad and complex issues posed by the drum kit and for the drummers who play them. Mandy J. Smith considers the example of John Bonham to illustrate how the corporeal experience of drumming reflects embodied experience unique to the drum kit. Adam Patrick Bell and Cornel Hrisca-Munn consider the configurable nature of the drum kit as it relates to accessibility, ability, and notions of disability. Vincent Andrisani and Margaret MacAulay analyse representations of drumming culture on social media using the case study of Instagram, specifically as it pertains to and informs notions of gender and performance on the drum kit. Nat Grant offers an account of activist drum culture using the case study of *Hey Drums*, an Australian initiative, founded by Grant, to offer female and non-binary drummers opportunities to play drums, connect with other drummers, and more fully participate in activities pertaining to the drum kit. Finally, Gareth Dylan Smith provides readers with considerations of drumming and identity, specifically on the deeply personal reason he became a drummer.

#### Notes

- 1 J. Michael Pignato. 'Situating Technology within and without Music Education' in A. S. Ruthmann and R. Mantie (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Technology and Music Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 2 J. Lave and E. Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

PART I

Histories of the Drum Kit

## 1 The Drum Kit in Theory

MATT BRENNAN

### Introduction

What is a drum kit and how do we study it? There is a commonsense answer to this question: a drum kit is a musical instrument comprising an arrangement of drums, cymbals, and associated hardware, and it can be studied both formally (not just through private tuition but also prestigious music schools and academies) and informally (by practicing along to recordings, playing in bands, and so on). And yet this commonsense answer is deceptive because it hinges on taken-for-granted assumptions about the stability of the term ‘drum kit’ and the conventional ways of studying it. The problem, of course, is that musical definitions and conventions are not fixed, immovable, or timeless; they are always in flux and in a constant process of being shaped by shifting historical and cultural contexts.

In fact, the definition of the drum kit – and consensus regarding its appropriate study – have changed dramatically over the course of the instrument’s history. This chapter is a rough guide to unpacking that history, and in doing so it treats the drum kit not as a fixed object but as a theoretical concept. What follows is a discussion of the drum kit in theory divided into three parts: (1) the invention and changing status of the instrument; (2) the trajectory of drum kit studies within the wider field of musical instrument scholarship; and (3) a discussion of the ‘drumscape’ as a theoretical tool.

### The Invention of the Drum Kit

The drum kit is a uniquely American instrument whose invention coincided with the birth of jazz at the turn of the twentieth century; or at least this is the prevailing origin story that we see reproduced in numerous popular histories of the instrument.<sup>1</sup> A typical version of the myth goes like this:

The drum set is one of New Orleans’ greatest gifts to American popular music. When the brass parade bands stopped marching and settled down in the riverboats to play – when the dances and comics in minstrel shows

[7]

## 8 Matt Brennan

needed percussive accompaniment – when the blues came drifting off the plantations and mixed with Caribbean and African rhythms to make a new music called jazz, the drum kit was born.<sup>2</sup>

A similar account appears in a 2019 BBC documentary on the drum kit presented by Stewart Copeland. While being filmed on location in downtown New Orleans, Copeland holds up an enlarged photograph of the drummer Dee Dee Chandler, who played with the John Robichaux Society Orchestra at the tail end of the nineteenth century. Pointing to the bottom of Chandler's bass drum, Copeland informs the viewer that 'down here is one of the most important inventions in modern music', and then declares Chandler to be 'one of the first snare drum guys to play the bass drum at the same time ... by inventing a homemade foot pedal'.<sup>3</sup> To be fair to Copeland, the photograph of Chandler (taken circa 1896) is arguably the earliest surviving *photograph* of a drummer standing next to their bass drum pedal. But the viewer would be mistaken if they made the leap of assuming the photograph of Chandler was the first documented *evidence* of a bass drum pedal, or that it was unquestionably invented in New Orleans. Putting to one side the question of whether the hi-hat (which does not appear in drum catalogues until the mid-1920s) or separate tension tom-toms (which appear in the mid-1930s) are necessary core components of a drum kit, I will for the moment restrict my investigation specifically to the origin of the bass drum pedal.

Drummers have experimented with ways of playing more than one percussion instrument at once for centuries, if not millennia. To take a relatively recent historical example, it was common in the nineteenth century for both marching band and orchestral drummers to attach a cymbal to the rim of their bass drum so that they could play both at once.<sup>4</sup> Jayson Dobney has documented that this practice was also evident in the United States, noting that 'photographs taken during the Civil War often show a cymbal attached to a bass drum for use in a military band. After the war, this configuration could be found in many of the community and town concert bands that were gaining popularity throughout the country'.<sup>5</sup>

When theatre and symphonic orchestras attempted to represent the sounds of military marching band drumming indoors in cramped conditions and with fewer musicians, some inventive drummers began to place the bass drum on the floor so they could simultaneously play snare drum (often placed on a chair, since snare drum stands had not yet been invented) and bass drum (with cymbal often attached to the rim) – a performance practice which by the 1880s came to be known as 'double drumming'.

9 *The Drum Kit in Theory*

So when did foot-operated drum pedals arrive on the scene? This is not an easy question to answer. In order to illustrate the complexity of the problem, and the messiness of historical research more broadly, I will present *seven* potential candidates for the bass drum pedal's moment of origin, each with its own narrative advantages and disadvantages.

Option 1: bass drum pedals have existed from the early nineteenth century, but robust documentation proving their existence has not survived. As I document elsewhere in my book *Kick It: A Social History of the Drum Kit*, there are surviving illustrations from early nineteenth-century France that portray at least two different one-man bands using homemade beaters attached to their feet to play a drum with one foot, and a pair of cymbals with the other.<sup>6</sup> Based on this evidence, you could argue for the possibility that foot pedals for drums and cymbals were likely discovered by multiple people independently in different countries from at least the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards and probably earlier. Here we begin to see that choosing a particular origin narrative serves a particular agenda: this first version of the bass drum pedal origin story privileges (a) the international roots of the technologies that inform the drum kit as an instrument; and (b) a 'multiple discovery' (no one person is attributed) rather than a 'lone genius' (one person only is attributed) narrative of invention. This origin narrative also de-privileges (a) innovations that have documented widespread impact (e.g. a pedal design that was successfully mass-produced); and (b) the USA as the country of origin for the proto-drum kit.

Option 2: the oldest surviving example of a foot-operated drum pedal is located (somewhat surprisingly) in the Keswick Museum in England. (A full discussion of this unusual bass drum pedal can be found in a 2014 journal article by Paul Archibald.)<sup>7</sup> It was created by an inventor named Cornelius Ward for the novelty Richardson Rock and Steel Band. If we chose this as a moment of origin, it privileges (a) a single named inventor; (b) the role of drummers in novelty music (as opposed to jazz, for example); and (c) historical instruments in museum collections as a source of evidence.

Option 3: in the published memoir of Arthur Rackett, a long-time drummer for the John Philip Sousa Band, he recalled that 'in 1882 I settled in Quincy, Illinois. This was about the time that the first foot pedal came out. Dale of Brooklyn made it. Everybody laughed at the idea, but I sent for one and started to practice in the woodshed'.<sup>8</sup> This moment privileges oral history (Rackett's memory preserved in print) but ignores the need for material evidence (no catalogue or paper trail corroborate the memory survives).

## 10 Matt Brennan

Option 4: the oldest legal patent for a bass drum pedal dates back to 1887, when George Olney of St Louis, Missouri, was granted a patent for a design very similar to that of Dee Dee Chandler, but Olney's patent predates the photograph of Chandler by approximately nine years. This option privileges legal patents as documents of record, but de-privileges those who may have come up with a similar design but did not manage (or were somehow prevented) from patenting their idea.

Option 5: the earliest example I can find of a bass drum pedal being sold in an instrument catalogue is from 1893, when the German manufacturer Paul Stark published a catalogue to advertise his goods at the Chicago World's Fair. This option privileges commercial production and evidence from instrument catalogues, and de-privileges the USA as the accepted country of origin for the bass drum pedal.

Option 6: as mentioned above, the earliest photograph of a drummer next to his bass drum pedal is likely that of Dee Dee Chandler in New Orleans circa 1896. It privileges the city of New Orleans, African American culture (Chandler was black), photographic evidence, and the notion that the drum kit only coalesces as an instrument through a particular kind of musical performance practice (e.g. dance music influenced by New Orleans second line drumming). It de-privileges patents as evidence (i.e. Olney 1887), countries outside the USA, and popular music not rooted in the jazz tradition.

Option 7: arguably the most famous of all the candidates outlined so far is William F. Ludwig's 1909 patent for a highly successful and influential bass drum pedal design. This option privileges the overall impact a particular design has on the rest of drumming culture. From 1909 onwards Ludwig's design is not only successfully mass-produced and sold but also widely imitated by other manufacturers.

The point of outlining seven different possible origin moments for the bass drum pedal is not, in my view, to then select one of them as the definitive version. Instead, the point is to draw attention the *historiography* of the drum kit – in other words, to draw attention to the processes of inclusion and exclusion that must be made when writing the instrument's history. To investigate the origin of the drum kit, like any historical project, is necessarily to sift through a wide range of partial sources and piece together a story, which inevitably involves making judgments about what to leave in, and what to leave out of the story.

Put simply, there is frequently more than one way of framing the origin story of a musical instrument. The point here is that each of the possibilities above serves a particular ideological agenda, and to privilege one narrative necessarily excludes a host of equally important influences, inspirations, and voices. By giving attention to the multiple possible origin narratives and



## 11 *The Drum Kit in Theory*

their implications, we can gain a better understanding of who and what we are including and excluding in the stories we tell, and why.<sup>9</sup>

The historiographical lesson learned from the bass drum pedal can also be applied to invention of the drum kit in full as a distinct instrument – there is more than one possible moment of origin. Does the first drum kit appear in 1906, when the Philadelphia-based instrument manufacture J. W. Pepper publishes a catalogue featuring a pre-bundled ‘trap drummer’s outfit’ (comprising a bass drum, snare drum, cymbal, and bass drum pedal)? Or is it 1918, when Ludwig & Ludwig first advertise their own ‘Jazz-Er-Up’ outfit equipped with their signature bass drum pedal? Is it 1928, when a new accessory that we retrospectively recognize as a hi-hat pedal (produced and distributed by the Walberg & Auge company in Worcester, Massachusetts) begins appearing in multiple drum manufacturer catalogues? Or must we wait until 1936, when Gene Krupa collaborates with the Slingerland company to create the new ‘Radio King’ series of drum kits equipped with separate-tension tom-tom drums? To complicate matters further, what happens when electronic drum kits are introduced from roughly the 1980s onwards, or virtual drum kits from the 2000s onwards? Can a drum kit be acoustic, electronic, or virtual and still count as a drum kit? If this question causes even a modest amount of debate, then we have to assume that the meaning of a ‘drum kit’ is not fully stable. The pioneers of the acoustic drum kit could not have predicted that in the twenty-first century, debates around the meanings of a ‘drum kit’, ‘drummer’, and ‘drumming’ would include voices from computer software engineers and multinational corporations packaging virtual drummers into their digital audio workstations. Nevertheless, these actors significantly influence our contemporary understanding of what counts as a drum kit, drummer, or drumming performance.

To ask such questions is to point towards a broader question in the sociology of knowledge: what aspects of its design must stay the same in order for a drum kit to *remain* a drum kit over time? In the twenty-first century, when as many or more electronic drum kits are sold relative to acoustic drum kits – and when the sounds of multiple drum kits can be stored and deployed within a single software plugin – is the definition of what constitutes a drum kit categorically fixed? My argument is that it is not and never was, and this is what I mean when I say the drum kit is not a fixed object but a theoretical concept.

## The History and Future of Studying the Drum Kit

Having now seen that the ‘drum kit’ is a contested concept whose meaning changes over time and across different contexts, it will come as no surprise

## 12 Matt Brennan

that the same applies to *studying* the drum kit. William F. Ludwig published an essay in 1927 detailing his recollection of how drummers in the United States studied their instrument:

The old timers of Chicago were practically all rudimental drummers . . . [and] all probably had the same experience in learning to drum as I had. My dad stepped into Lyon and Healy's store and simply said he wanted a drum book. [A book of military drum rudiments] was laid out on the counter and could be purchased for \$1.00 each. It was the only drum book that [the store] had or recommended.<sup>10</sup>

With the advent of ragtime at the turn of the twentieth century, however, Ludwig observed that a new way of studying the instrument appeared: 'new beats were invented, new systems of playing the drum were invented and, in fact, ragtime methods of all sorts appeared on the market, each one different from the other. Originality seemed to be the main object'.<sup>11</sup> The ragtime and jazz eras fuelled a clash of musical cultures, specifically a tension between musicians who learned their instrument through reading and following notated sheet music versus those who learned to play through more informal methods and improvisation. In truth, learning to play the drum kit had always involved both formal and informal approaches, and even after the drum kit gained acceptance in institutions of higher education as part of university jazz programmes, drummers typically continued to study performance practice on their instrument using a mixed methods approach.

For most of the twentieth century, the practice of studying the drum kit could be divided into one of two categories: *construction* (how the instrument was designed and manufactured) or *performance* (how it was played). The study of the drum kit's physical construction can arguably be situated within the wider field of 'organology' – a term coined in 1933 to designate the academic study of the material and acoustic properties of musical instruments dating back to the nineteenth century; it should be noted, however, that the scope of organology was severely limited for many decades, and the drum kit was not considered worthy of serious attention until the late twentieth century (see, for instance, James Blades' 1970 landmark study, *Percussion Instruments and Their History*, which briefly contextualizes the drum kit's origins amidst the wider history of percussion).<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the study of drum kit performance can be situated with the broader field of 'performance practice' scholarship, which in the case of the drum kit made inroads into the academy with the gradual institutionalization of jazz in higher education over the second half of the twentieth century (Theodore Dennis Brown's 1976 doctoral dissertation, *A History and Analysis of Jazz Drumming to 1942*, is a milestone in this respect).<sup>13</sup>