

The Timeline Of Marching And Field Percussion: Part 3

By Jeff Hartsough and Derrick Logozzo

Part 3 in our series on marching and field percussion history discusses innovations from 1900 to 1960. Once again, the timeline focuses on these questions:

- How and where did our modern drum corps originate?
- How did marching equipment develop?
- Who were the innovators in marching percussion?
- How and why did the drumming styles change over the years?
- When did marching percussionists first appear in history?

1900–1950

In the 20th Century, marching percussion thrived in several types of groups, some of which were based in the military while others were supported by civic or patriotic organizations. Two of these were the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In the 1920s, both groups sponsored senior fife, drum and bugle corps competitions for men returning from World War I who continued to play (Spalding: 122). These corps performed at many patriotic parades as well as in three forms of competition. There were corps made up of the traditional fifes and drums, those with drums and bugles, and corps using all three instruments. Some of these were standstill groups, while others, particularly the drum and bugle corps, were marching and maneuvering groups. Two further classifications existed for each group, called Ancient or Modern, determined by whether or not the group played their music at 110 or 120 beats per minute, respectively (Perilloux: 1a, 7).

In 1921, the American Legion held its first national convention in Kansas City, Missouri in which the first senior drum and bugle corps champion was the General Custer Corps from Battle Creek, Michigan (McGrath: 150). The VFW held its first national convention and competition in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1928. The winner of that was a drum and bugle corps from Lansing, Michigan (McGrath: 150). In 1936, an important addition to the contests that would soon dominate the activity was the formation of junior drum and bugle corps for the sons of World War I veterans (Spalding: 122).

The rules for competition between the VFW and the American Legion events varied slightly. However, both organizations held weekly contests every summer for the corps and individuals. As a matter of fact, William F. Ludwig, Jr. won the 1933 American Legion Individual Snare Drum Championship (McGrath: 151). This individual contest was exceedingly important to the history of rudimental drumming. Dan Spalding explains why:

“One of the requirements for this contest was the performance of the long roll. Because of the discrepancies between the two standard drum books (of the day), the *Bruce and Emmett* and the *Strube*, the roll was being performed with a lack of uniformity and there evolved a great deal of controversy as to how these contests should be judged. The *Bruce and Emmett* required an accent on the second beat of the roll while starting and [an open-close-open manner of performing it]. *Strube*, however, did not advocate either of these techniques. This discrepancy eventually led to the formation of the National Association of Rudimental Drummers on June 20th, 1933 at the American Legion National Convention in Chicago. At this famous meeting,

which was organized by William F. Ludwig and the Ludwig Drum Co., 13 leading percussionists from around the country adopted the 26 Standard American Drum Rudiments” (Spalding: 122-123).

Those percussionists were: Harry Thompson, George Robinson, William Flowers, William Kieffer, William Hammond, Joe Hathaway, George Lawrence Stone, Roy Knapp, William Ludwig, Sr., M.M. Gerlach, William Miller, Edward Straight and J. Burns Moore (McGrath: 151).

In remembering this first meeting, William F. Ludwig, Sr. gives some details: “I will never forget that evening. We talked and played rudiments [for] six hours well into that morning. But we felt that we had saved the drum rudiments by adopting a practical set of rudiments without deviation from any of the then...established methods...We divided the 26 rudiments into two sections by selecting...what we termed at the time, the 13 essential that each applicant had to play as a test for membership into the National Association of Rudimental Drummers” (Spalding: 123).

Also, in the 1930s and '40s, several rudimental drummers became nationally known for their outstanding drumming and teaching systems. Two of them were previously mentioned: George Lawrence Stone of Boston—who taught jazz great Joe Morello as well as three-time American Legion Champion the Akroyd Drum and Bugle Corps—and J. Burns Moore of Connecticut, who was known as a truly remarkable snare drummer (McGrath: 151,153). Their style, as that of many players of the period, resembled the common technique of the Revolutionary and Civil War drummers. A great deal of continuous high arm-to-fingers movement was used in a very fluid manner (Spalding: 124).

Another drummer, similar to Moore, was Sanford Moeller from New York who taught Gene Krupa and Jim Chapin. Moeller produced great drum lines from 1933 to about 1960 that used a system of wave motions in their playing, which was truly unique in appearance from other corps (Andrews: 1). One of these drum lines exists today under the name of the Charles W. Dickerson Fife, Drum and Bugle Corps in Mt. Vernon, New York. A fourth drummer who was extremely famous for his astounding technique was Earl Sturtze, who taught several successful groups, one of them being the Charles T. Kirk Fife, Drum and Bugle Corps from Brooklyn, New York (Spalding: 123). Some of Sturtze’s students in the late 1930s and '40s were Eric Perilloux, Bob Redican, Hugh Quigley and Frank Arsenault, each of whom would go on to set the standard in competitive rudimental drumming for years to come (Spalding: 124).

Instrumentation in the 1920s, '30s and '40s was fairly consistent. Most drum lines used eight to ten snare drums, each of which was 12" x 15"; eight to ten tenor drums, which also were 12" x 15"; four to five bass drums; and in the drum and bugle corps, four to five cymbals (Spalding: 123). Some of the corps had gone to metal rod-tensioned drums with gut strings as snares, while others, like the Moeller drum lines, used rope-tensioned drums (Andrews: 2). Also, the tenor drums, as stated by Harold Prentice in *The Champion Drum Book*, “are of Scottish origin first used in the Pipe Band of the...Highland and Light Infantry in Glasgow in 1912.” Tenor drums were first used in the United States following WW I (McGrath: 157).

The “portable” German bell lyras of this era were constructed of steel bars and in the diatonic scale only—that is, a single row of bells approximately 1 1/2 octaves. The chromatic bars were carried separately in a pouch and the player had to unclip the natural bars and replace them with the necessary sharps or flats as the music re-



quired. In 1932, Bill Ludwig, Sr. came up with the idea to produce “marching” bells with aluminum bars to reduce the weight with the chromatics. It was designed to be carried in the vertical position on a telescopic staff, thus eliminating the need for the extra bars as well as the transferring of them on the march. In 1933, the production of the modern chromatic aluminum bell lyra, as we know it today, came into being (Ludwig).

1950-1960

From 1950 to 1960, there was a great deal of change in styles, techniques and equipment brought forth by a new generation of instructors. Essentially, marching percussion in the modern drum and bugle corps began to incorporate new ideas—different than those of traditional military drumming.

In the 1950s, the average size of a drum line in a drum and bugle corps was three snares, three tenors, two bass drums and one cymbal player (Spalding: 123). The dimensions of the leg snare drums were 10" x 15" or 12" x 15", the leg tenors were normally 12" x 16", the bass drums were 14" x 28" and the cymbals were either 14" or 16" (Spalding: 125). In the late '50s, the scotch bass drums were becoming more popular with the marching bands since they were easier to carry than some of the wider bass drums used at the time.

Haskell Harr said that the larger tenor drums in the '50s were being carried vertically like bass drums because they were harder to control using leg rests. Hence, the vertical tenor drum holder was developed. One of the more interesting innovations to come from the '50s was the 6 1/2 x 18 tenor-scotch bass drum. The Slingerland drum company developed this to make crossover strokes easier. Subsequently, tenor drum players began using felt mallets, which replaced the previously used sheepskin mallets.

The most significant invention came in 1957 when Remo Belli developed his plastic drumhead, which allowed for playing in adverse weather conditions (Hurley: 1). This invention forged the way for all drumheads used thereafter.

Newer playing styles in the 1950s were being developed, especially throughout the Midwest and the East coast. During 1954,

Frank Arsenault was teaching the high, fast, open technique to his Midwestern drum lines. To most everyone's surprise, they were executing cleanly (Spalding: 124). At the same time on the East Coast, John Flowers and Les Parks started a very influential movement that required one to play closer to the drumhead, utilizing more wrist control. Their style used all-around uniformity of hand position and arm movement (Spalding: 124).

Though most people felt that this style took away from the traditional powerful sound, these gentlemen believed that they were replacing it with a more precise and better executed sound. John Flowers explains: “Several instructors found that due to the increasing difficulty of their repertoire and the faster marching cadence, execution had become more difficult in the open style manner. Therefore, various styles of drumming began to appear...[one of which] stressed drumming closer to the drum” (124).

In the mid-'50s, percussion arrangements started to evolve, due in part to the work of an outstanding rudimental drummer, Eric Perillioux, who began arranging percussion parts that did not rely solely on the standard 26 rudiments. Perillioux was also one of the first to discard the layering of the snare drum and bass drum parts and chose to feature their voices independently. In addition to this, he introduced the rudimental bass drum to the modern drum and bugle corps in 1956 (Spalding: 126).

Also in 1956, two of the last stylistic changes to occur were the introduction of drum solos staged at the front of the field and the use of rolls on the bass drums, both of these having been accredited to Perillioux (Spalding: 126). All of these innovations in drumming systems and equipment set the stage for another evolution in marching and field percussion in the 1960s.

Part 4 of the Timeline will include 1960 to the present.

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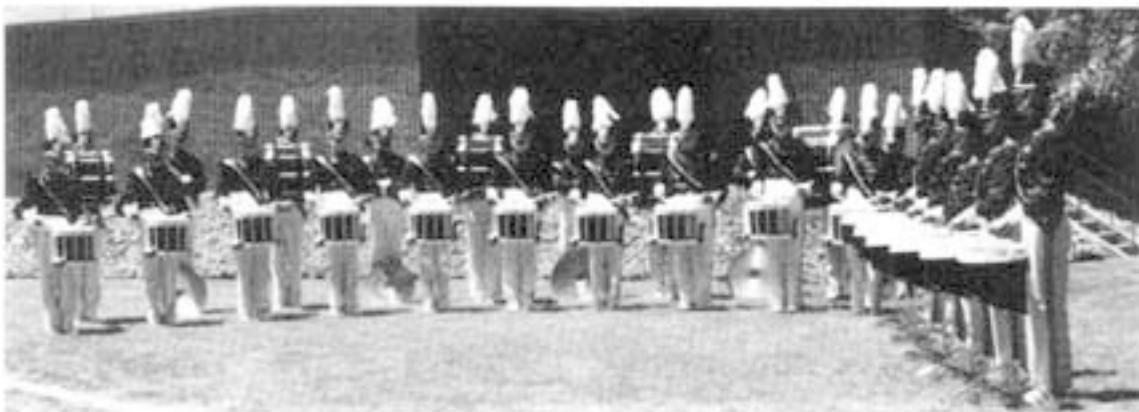
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Jeff Hartsough is a member of the PAS Marching Percussion Committee and former caption head of the Magic of Orlando Drum & Bugle Corps. He is president of Perfection in Performance, a percussion consulting, arranging and instructing business in Columbus, Ohio, and Percussion Educational Specialist and manager for Columbus Pro Percussion, Inc. Hartsough has studied with Robert Breithaupt at Capital University and holds two Bachelor of Science degrees from Franklin University. He has marched with the 27th Lancers and Suncoast Sound Drum & Bugle Corps, is an adjudicator for the Ohio Music Educators Association and has radio, recording and touring experience with several regional groups.

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Hartsough is also editor and contributing author for Focus on Percussion, a newsletter for middle- and high-school music programs in Ohio and its surrounding states.



Derrick Logozzo received his Bachelor's degree in Music Education from Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, and currently attends the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas, where he is pursuing a Master's degree in Performance. He has performed with various jazz, Latin and chamber ensembles, and with the Canton Bluecoats Drum & Bugle Corps. He was co-chair of the marching percussion events at PASIC '93 in Columbus.

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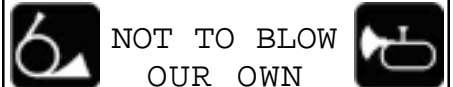
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