

# The Perfectionists

## The History of Rudimental Snare Drumming From Military Code to Field Competition

BY KEN MAZUR

A percussion performance without rudiments is like a lecture without syllables: the language is primitive. No one will know what you are trying to say. Rudimental sticking initiated all percussive presentation: field competition, drumset coordination, and orchestral performance. Because of physical, coordination, and mental demands, rudimental drummers learned to use mind and muscle like professional athletes to execute complex individual solos or attain competitive drumline uniformity.

Accuracy was paramount, best taught by a knowledgeable mentor, similar to martial-arts training. Use of rudiments in competitive military-styled standstill and marching units allowed for objective comparisons of skill, creating the catalyst for developing technique. With technical maturity, rudimental drummers became time painters, creating tension and release with nuances of proportion, volume, accent pattern and their counterpoint, duration, endurance, and texture.

The snare drum is not a "pretty" instrument; it is an instrument of war. Battlefield commanders desired the quicker tactical maneuvering of smaller units, but were hampered by unreliable small arms and immobile cannon that needed up to 13 commands to fire. Short, simple drum codes better organized this effort. As more codes were needed, space between quarter-note beats of the early 16th century were filled with grace notes, flams, and taps, creating a need for qualified battle drummers, whose coordination increased with time.

By the early 19th century, drummers were holding back or "sweetening" the attacks of the prominent, left-hand lead, Seven-Stroke Roll, "for in doing this, the rests between the strokes and

rolls will consequently be longer, which will make it appear much more elegant and intelligible."<sup>1</sup> Hardened Civil War veterans were entranced by their regiments' drumming skills. Phrasing was not militarily useful, as openly spaced notes were best understood in battle. This was music. "And when a dozen or more of the lads, with their caps set saucily on the sides of their heads, led a regiment in a review with their get-out-of-the-way-Old-Dan-Tuckerish style of music, it made the men in the ranks step off as though they were bound for a Donnybrook fair or some other pleasure excursion."<sup>2</sup>

Drummers were soloing before 1900, but no one told the enemy. Lieutenant Hamilton Hodgson's diary entry on August 26, 1898 discusses a tired English army: "I don't think I ever appreciated drums more. They got a very long step, and soon the whole brigade was going to the step. After each time they were applauded and cheered vociferously. Drummer Hill, our show drummer who prides himself on having a black mark the size of a penny on the center of the vellum, got his chance occasionally with a side drum solo. Poor chap, his drumming days are over as he is wounded in his wrists—bullet came through drum first."<sup>3</sup>

Advancing armies could not be stopped until the battle of Franklin, Tennessee on November 30, 1864, when Confederates charged into a few pockets of seven-shot repeaters, causing troops to impulsively pull their hats in front of their faces. The Civil War was the last to depend on drums to address such tactics, although three of the seven British drummers awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry did so between 1914 and 1916 when thousands of drums went overseas for World War I.

Lt. Henry Shrapnel's 1784 exploding

shell with a primitive timing fuse, Robert P. Parrott's rifled 10-pounder, and Tyler Henry's 1860 repeating rifle with a self-contained copper cartridge shredded infantry. Samuel Colt added his pistol, a five-pound hand cannon, doubling production for the war. Dr. Richard Gatling's hand-cranked machine gun ended matters. With railroads and steamships available, the drum would become the center of musical battle.

Field days existed as early as 1874 and 1875 in Connecticut, readying for the centennial celebration in 1876. Prizes for individual drummers existed, but not the full line. A "best drum corps" silk banner was awarded in 1876, made by "ladies in Rockville." Newspapers announced best-drummer awards such as Rockville's 1877 pair of gold-tipped sticks, though the dueling pistols and rocking chair were handy too.<sup>4</sup> Contestants wanted fair evaluation, and prizes taken seriously. Rules were discussed. Judges were blindfolded, faced the opposite way, or put in a barn listening to competitors outside. Contest quality control had already begun for 20 minutes or more of individual performance.

An 1894 newspaper tells judges to stop being subjective! "Individual drumming: 1st Long Roll, 2nd 5 Stroke Roll, 3rd Double Drag, 4th Treble Ratamacue, 5th Flam Paradiddle, 6th Three Camps, and One beat in 2/4 or 6/8 time. Judges will confine themselves strictly to time and execution and not the sweetness of tone of instruments."<sup>5</sup> There was mention of sticking uniformity such as "four right – one left."

Photos of Civil War vets show left-handers might not switch. It became a judging issue. The Connecticut State title was disputed in 1893, but judges "claimed that their decision was based on points: Gerrish 26 points, Basney 25,

Moore 22. There was a kicking over the judges' decisions, but that was to be expected among so many contestants. Burns Moore of the Morris Drum Corps, whom was given 3rd prize for individual snare drumming, was particularly incensed, and said he would never beat a drum again."<sup>6</sup>

J. Burns Moore took out a newspaper ad challenging Basney and Gerrish to a drum-off. Sidney Basney, lead drummer for the Bolton Drum Corps in the late 1890s and 1900s, was a black drummer who beat everybody of his time, received seven second places, yet curiously never won. Meriden Ct. August 28, 1895 – Individual Drumming: J. B. Moore 69, Sidney Basney 61, F. B. Bunnell 58. Moore wins a pair of sleeve buttons.<sup>7</sup>

Drummers were trying to get in shape to win. John Philip Sousa (1886): "A good plan is to hold the sticks together about three inches from the buttons and turn them, at first slowly, and gradually increasing the movement until great rapidity is attained." An 1897 book wants this exercise increased "un-

til out of breath with exertion."<sup>8</sup> Drummers still do this same exercise out of nervous habit to skittishly calm themselves—possibly a Civil War warm-up exercise.

Reverence to military code was disappearing. Patrick Murray (Moodus Fife and Drum Corps): "In the late 1880s and into the 1900s, fife and drum corps drummers were mixing with those in the schools. The kids wanted speed. They taught in a way that excited them. To go faster gave a livelier beat. It caught on."

Ed Lemley took lessons from "the wizard of the drum" in the early 1900s: Frank Fancher won more snare titles than anyone in history—over 120 including eight Connecticut championships between 1906 and 1924. Walter Sprance says that the apprenticeship began with Ed arriving early to light kerosene lamps. After some days, Ed asked, "When am I going to start drumming?" The reply: "When you can put a drum together properly and work on a drum right!" He first had to learn to tuck drumheads, getting angry carrying and replacing them. Fancher told him, "You learn how to do it the right way or you're part of the problem."

If you didn't take care of a rope drum, your sound and playing would suffer. Time spent preening instruments cost the drummers of yesteryear much time and frustration. Bobby Redican: "Fancher was a big powerful guy. He didn't play stuff as hard as we did. We did our own rudimental applications later—nice rhythmical things."

To some, rudimental drumming was doomed, surviving the Depression and Vaudeville "contraptions" via William F. Ludwig (1879–1973) and Sanford A. "Gus" Moeller (1886–1960). While fife and drum sternly held ground, Bill and Gus fought rudimental "shortcuts." Ludwig had a drum company to influence events. Gus was just plain incensed, interviewing many old Civil War drummers at their retirement homes while on tour with a band in 1925.

The 1927 "talkie" *The Jazz Singer* with Al Jolson put "trap" drummers out of business, but the Depression soon followed. Bobby Redican: "You must understand that not too many were dedicated at that time. There weren't many good instructors. Moeller played in the Footguard Band in New York. You



J. Burns Moore

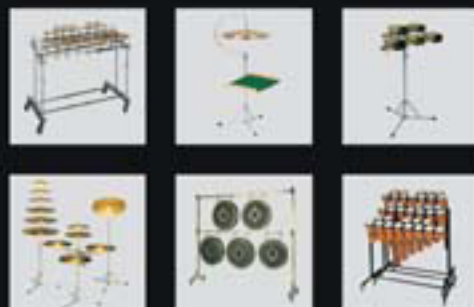
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had to know what you were doing to play there."

Bill Boerner: "Gus was a drum maker later on. He would make you one for \$25. But going up to get it was another story. He would have you play it, and if he thought you weren't very good he would ask you to take it off and 'get out of here.'"

Gus had more than attitude. The Spanish American War corporal perceived prejudice against rudimental drummers because of military camp duty: "The false notion was conceived through rudimental drummers always doing this work, but *they were the only ones who could do it*. The difficult quick-steps and the army duty are the highest class of drumming."<sup>9</sup>

Gus was very thorough and shockingly aware of "lead-hand switch" coordination, using "mind" and "thought" terminology: "This causes the mind to shift so often from one hand to the other that the correct hold and stroke is sure to be neglected as it has not yet become natural and still needs thought."<sup>10</sup>

Later in life, Moeller wanted drumming included in the Olympics. Drummers were adopting scientific methods. The trick then was to play on carbon paper, looking for intensity faults and placement symmetry.

World War I veterans returning from "The Great War" in 1918 joined service-organization bugle corps, learning the craft as adults. Rules stipulated a 45-degree drum angle, observed in 1920s and '30s Legion parade photos. Everyone played "around the tree": arms out away from the body and sticks at 55- to 60-degree angles to center.

Your ticket into finals competition was a good parade score judged only on appearance. Simple roll-offs were important: "A prominent judge of bands and corps once told us, 'I can tell just how good a drum corps is by their roll-off. If they play that clean, up to

tempo, and they all come in together, I know the rest of their playing must be good too.'"<sup>11</sup>

The Charles T. Kirk drumline (fife, drum, and bugle) was the best in the world in the middle and late 1930s, playing many rudiments using dynamics. The Kirks did not have uniform technique, yet executed a modern 120 beats-per-minute sound via the Ripperger brothers, who went to Con-



Sanford A. "Gus" Moeller on his march from Mount Vernon, NY to Boston for the American Legion Convention 1930.

necticut and brought back the high-handed style. You earned your spot before drum sergeant Harold Ripperger on the family kitchen table. His six-inch "army style" questioned, J. Frank Martin wrote a stinging letter of resignation. Martin worried about historically authentic "code," considering Double Drags and Paradiddle-Diddles at 128 in 6/8 time not physically possible.

Jay Tuomey (Sons of Liberty): "Before the war, Brooklyn is where rudimental drumming took off. It had been coming for a long time and went through a down period. Gus Moeller started it back up. George and Harold Ripperger played like no one else in the world played. Kirks had a professional look and sound—a class act. We [Yonkers City] only used 10 different rudiments and played marches, which was not all

that difficult. Charles T. Kirk Corps used 25 rudiments just for one piece! Their instructor, George Ripperger, was the best around and won New York State individuals many times. Earl Sturtze was also involved there with the individuals in Kirk's snare line, a former champion from the 1920s."

Al Linquity (Charles T. Kirk): "I played with Ginger Ploeger, Eric Perilloux, Harold and George Ripperger at Kirk. The tunes were arranged by Pop Rippenger—many progression-type pieces and themes such as the north and south, Scottish, and Irish music. I was 15 when I joined. It was a senior corps—18 was the limit—but if you were good they let you march."

Eric Perrilloux (Charles T. Kirk): "Frank [Martin] was involved with Kirk before the Rippengers were there, but it was a low style. Before that, the Rippengers played much lower to the drum—six to eight inches. By 1932, the corps was doing real rudimental drumming. In 1937, I was 16 at the time and youngest in the line. I remember going to watch

the American Legion M&M finals in New York in '37. The corps lines were pitiful! They were really poor drummers. Rudiments were not common in 1937. Kirk had 12 fifers—that was big for a fife line—and 12 horns. At most Kirk had six or eight snares and two or three rudimental bass [drums]. Contests at that time were judged on T, T, and E (time, intonation, and execution). There was

no separate drum sheet. You didn't get a drum mark. The Kirk corps introduced separate sheets for individual sections in 1938. It was voted on by all the units and it passed."

Ed Olsen: "The New York drummers were more or less self taught. Connecticut had the famous names: Sturtze, J. Burns Moore, and others. New York had Moeller and J. Frank Martin, who was taught by two students of Gardner Strube. Martin didn't like the Connecticut Ancient style. New York drummers played with their arms close to their sides. They drummed close to the head. Charles T. Kirk corps picked up the high arm-swing motion because it looked fancier coming down the street from a distance. The New York drummers were becoming enthusiastic about the Connecticut style. It affected them. I know cause I saw it. They would come from all over the city by subway, go to Owl's Head Park, and play till the police came. New York drummers practiced like hell to play the Connecticut style. Eddy Fitzgerald and Jimmy Woods traveled from New York to Connecticut and walked ten miles to Sturtze's house to take lessons."

Gus Moeller watched Kirk's rehearsals in 1931. His students were taught the loose right-hand-pinky fulcrum described by Charles Ashworth (1812) as a fencing technique—left hand with a gap between the thumb and index finger. Moeller's over-dramatic arm motion—the arm moving before the bead of the stick—worked with the slower Civil War cadence. However, his best Charles Dickerson FD&B students were running headlong into economical tap-and-grace-note control of Earl Sturtze's young St. Francis students who were developing "super-speed" breakdown roll peaks at 132 to 140 beats-per-minute. Moeller's heart was in the right place but it was already the wrong time.

Eric Perrilloux: "Moeller had a unique style—a peculiar left-hand motion. Imagine your left hand on a door knob and then twisting it. Very odd. No one ever played that way before. It didn't look like the other players in a line. [You] can't have that."

Al Linquity: "Gus wasn't the Earl Sturtze-type drummer. He had a loose style. You'd never win a rudimental contest with it...but he judged a lot.

They put him on timing. He didn't judge drums all that much."

With Moeller's wrath finding targets, William F. Ludwig assembled drummers on June 20, 1933 in Chicago at the American Legion National Convention to form the N.A.R.D., the National Association of Rudimental Drummers. Although popular, the gathering drew yawns from the fife and drum crowd, who were already king of the hill, never to concede their perky anticipated phrasings for World War I vets whose weak left hands couldn't execute Seven-Stroke Rolls at faster tempos. Judges marked a mistake for every rudiment, so drum and bugle corps opted for the less physical (and in time) Five-Stroke Roll. They did agree how different Civil War methods would come forward, resulting in the Standard 26 American Rudiments and a breakdown procedure for contest drumming with an acceleration to peak, evenly retarding to end. To gain membership, one had to pass an examination in front of a member.

Sid Skolnick: "I studied with J. Burns Moore, and still have my certificate of membership (#1168), a beautiful document printed on American Bank Note paper—like money."

Gerd Summer: "I was taking private lessons from Moore in 1934. It was 25 cents for a 30-minute lesson. Those were the first cuss words I ever heard! We did breakdowns a lot. He always said, 'Get your hands up!' I was told to practice an hour and a half every day."

Donald A. Fredrickson: "Moore was a stickler for 'sticks up!' One time he immediately knew I hadn't practiced. He threw me out of his studio! Well, I couldn't go home, of course! That was one wake-up call!"

Drum and bugle needed the Ancients experience. Joe Hathaway, the 1933 American Legion Champion, joined a fife and drum corps. "I had been 'throwing' the sticks at the drum, without any regard to technique. It was necessary to learn all over; I had to teach my left hand to do its part as well as the right. I spent many hours before a looking glass, practicing and watching my movements to get away from ragged and careless execution."<sup>12</sup>

Joe Mirsky (Post 95 FD&B): "We were encouraged to practice in front of mir-

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rors. We had very slanted drums—had to wear cloth on the knee. Some tied their drum to their knee. Judges were in Marine uniforms—an eagle eye out for everything. I can play very nicely on a pillow—did it a lot in 1936.”

Competition was mostly breakdowns, possibly 85 of 100 points. The solo showed which rudiments you could break down! Recaps show three to six were required. All solos were judged for tempo consistency of the “Ancient 110” and “Modern 120,” a machine designed by Moeller. The judging of 1890 was more general commenting, and timing could decide your fate, but soon judges were counting the number of rudiments you played. Those who played less than ten had scores reduced by 20 to 30 percent.

Joseph A. Gillotti: “Eddie Keane and the Hatter’s Drum Corps were open season for the likes of Sturtze. My father told me the story where Earl made a comment on a contest sheet that the Hatters were not playing rudiments and was subsequently disparaged by J. Burns Moore: ‘If they’re not rudiments, then what in the hell are they, Earl?’”

Individual contests might be decided by ancillary items. Joe Hathaway was defeated soundly in his first contest (1932) because of his “inspection” mark. He studied *Training Regulations No. 75-5 “Specialists” Field Music—The Bugler*, from the Government Printing Office for 10 cents. In his second contest after practicing hours every day—uniform pressed and “putts” shined—in 1933, he won. Hathaway describes 1930s’ “flash” as “highly desirable,” holding his sticks in a horizontal plane, parallel to the ground, the beads al-

most touching to begin and end a breakdown. Period books show drummers—even J. Burns Moore—writing stick clicks into street beats and raising the opposite hand for a visual while playing one-handed *forte* quarter notes.

Ed Lemley was involved with the NARD in 1933 and ’34. His most famous “ahead of the times” drum beat is described by Walter Sprance, who is married to Ed’s granddaughter: “‘Crazy Army’ was written at Christmas time. It was 1933 or ’34. Ken Lemley’s father had built a crystal radio. He was listening to a station from Ireland at two or three in the morning and in his mind he got some parts going to the music. Ed used to be a blacksmith and a tool merchant. He built Ken a curved footboard on his bed that flipped over to practice on. You could adjust it to the proper height. He used to teach ten-year-old Kenny on it. Ed didn’t trust his memory so he had Kenny learn the part before he went to bed. It was not too well received. They would never accept something that syncopated back then.”

The father of scientific rudimental technique was Earl Sturtze (1901–1984), a ten-year-old student of Carl Frolich (of J. Burns Moore tutelage) who played with the Zigfield Follies. His greatest achievements were to adapt a style template to individual physiology and use the weight of the forearm for better power, dynamics, and control—more efficient use of the arms.

Olympic coaches agreed years later: “The coach has to properly correlate the structure of a technical skill with each individual’s psychological and

biological particularities.”<sup>13</sup> “Talent identification is better before puberty (Dragan, 1979) and includes (Kunst and Florescu, 1970): motor capacity, psychological capacity and biometric qualities, including physical build and bone formations.”<sup>14</sup>

Sturtze took over the St. Francis parochial school students of Dan English, a Lancraft Connecticut champion who died young in 1931. [Lancraft Fife and Drum represented by Connecticut champions George Gallagher (1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915), Harold Kling (1920, 2nd 1924), Earl Sturtze (1916, 2nd 1917, 2nd 1918, 1919, 1922, 1923, 1928 with Yalesville), Dan English (1925, 1926, 1927, 2nd 1928, 1929), and Nathan Marks (1933, 2nd 1934)]<sup>15</sup> Sturtze disliked wasted arm motion and lower New York methods where rolls didn’t sound open. J. Burns Moore used high grace notes, the remnants of military code. The Sturtze kids could play *pp* to *fff*. There was definitely a right and wrong way to now spend practice time.

Gary Pagnozzi (P.A.L. Cadets): “Sturtze didn’t think much of Ludwig’s or Burns Moore’s breakdowns. They didn’t do them properly. Moore had a higher note height and pounded his accents. Sturtze was lower.”

Bobby Redican: “Sturtze pupils had the upper hand all over. Most of his students became fine rudimentalists—quite a hardy reputation. Sturtze’s style was more practical. He had more successful methods of teaching—a lot of motion with good execution. Rippergers had tried to pick that up.”

Eric Perrilloux: “All the top drummers were Sturtze drummers. They had speed and power in their rolls and could go a notch higher and faster than anyone else. I could never get as closed or fast as Quigley or Redican at their best. I played harder stuff but Redican had power and speed. PERFECT! I wish I knew how they did it!”

They did it because there were more potential players than instruments during the Depression. Children improved or were sent home. Sturtze was technically ahead of his peers, constantly judging, running his own contests with ribbons and awards, writing score sheets and giving clinics.

Jack McGuire (St. Francis): “So many kids were playing in St. Francis at that time, if you goofed off you were out.

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Ray Ludee and I were both cut the first night! There were 30 or 40 of us trying out. A couple months later I came to practice and told Sturtze I hadn't been there before."

Matt Lyons (St. Francis): "The 3rd-grade level was in competition. The girls played bugle and the guys played drums. There were many contests, 20 to 30 a year. Sturtze would teach three or four corps in one day. Sturtze was a better technician than others—a German type perfectionist; very methodical. He kept a 3 x 5 card on me and even rated me after I was playing in the Stratford Legion corps with Arsenault! He would take me in his car with him—5th, 6th, and 7th graders—to other corps rehearsals. We would go to a practice and then he would take me to have supper. He did this with a lot of kids. You learn by watching others play. Sturtze took a giant step."

Jean Lyons (St. Francis): "At St. Francis there was an iron fence at the property line. They would march us right off the property to that fence. You step to the beat of the drum between classes. And you stayed in line. If you got low grades the principal would threaten to take you out of the corps."

Drummers were closing their hands around the stick more—"pinching"—to use more physical pressure, avoiding Moeller's "pinky finger" pressure advocated by early 19th-century authors. Flams have always measured a rudimental drummer's coordination. Sturtze: "The instant the stick strikes the pad, squeeze it with the fingers sufficiently to prevent it from bounding up, since the right stick must now stay down."<sup>16</sup>

Rebound was now technically defined: a more physical solution to better-position interior notes between accents; a small note placed with economy of motion, not "lifted" by the forearm. Military code needed volume. This was musical efficiency.

Jay Tuomey: "You simply turn the wrist. Nothing more need be done for a flam grace note." Such consistency developed professional-quality execution and dynamics. "Pinching the stick in this manner and keeping the last two fingers closed around it will result in the complete control which is necessary to play firm, steady beats."<sup>17</sup>

Bobby Redican: "I used a tight squeeze for certain rudiments."

Jack Tencza (Landcraft): "I used to pinch for faster rudiments. Flam grace notes were not even an inch off the drum—a quarter, maybe an eighth of an inch. Very low! Redican more than Sturtze would pinch the stick—grip harder at the accents."

Larry McCormick (Cavaliers): "You squeeze the stick. It helps control the rebound. That's what Frank [Arsenault] said to do."

Hand placement changed. The important item was not "from the end" but "how close to" the center of gravity. Playing near the end of a stick tires the muscle system; you're moving more weight, causing more accent rebound. Hold too far up and you lose wrist hinge motion. History shows a movement over 150 years toward the center of gravity. Potter (1815): Two and one half inches from the end (probably 19-inch sticks 3/4 to 1-inch diameter). Sousa (1886): Three inches from the end. Sturtze (1930s): about four inches from the butt end of the sticks. Toumey (1968): Hold an eighth of an inch behind center of gravity. Micah Brusse (2004), Blue Devil snare tech: "We cut the stick into thirds and grip at the last third." As tempos increased, stick diameters reduced to a "3S" (.750-inch diameter) and beads became much smaller.

Champion drummers from 1875 to 1983 built coordination and speed using a difficult 300-year-old method of gauging progress—the breakdown—where one gradually accelerates and

decelerates. Breakdown length differs: Stone (1931): from three to six minutes. Sturtze (1954): one-and-a-half minute acceleration and a one-and-a-half minute ritard. McCormick (1965): two minutes. This was carried forward to the beginning of DCI Individuals in 1973, and eliminated in 1984. PAS has recently used one minute but is changing to a more representative test at 90 seconds. The discipline is similar to the basic instruction of skaters' "figures" where judges go on ice to observe "edges" (etchings). Similarly, drummers looked for volume consistency, note spacing, and a gradual change in tempo.

Breakdowns—like exercises—are a musical simulation: "It has been only since the 1970s that [there has been] a strong desire to link an athlete's training process through modeling. A model is an imitation, a simulation of reality made out of specific elements of the sport...[and] should incorporate only those means of training which are identical to the nature of competition."<sup>18</sup>

The transition from military technique and march music to show tunes and other genres in bugle corps was due to technically proficient breakdown drummers from fife and drum executing the "26" in new combinations having longer phrases. The pride-of-the-Ancients 7- and 15-stroke rolls were whittled to 5's and 9's because drummers enjoyed marching to faster tempos of popular music. The threads that would sew code drumming to different music





genres were pleasing accent patterns found in Flam coordination, Ruff-Rat-Drum combinations, and mastery of continuous accented rolls, items of technical superiority. How could this happen breaking down only 26 variations?

- A drummer's greatest responsibility is to control time. Breakdowns require each note to be mentally, then physically, placed in time—no “guessing.” They teach how to bend time and master note separation—the ability to make minute adjustments. This helps the student master the art of concentration, the most important aspect of professionalism.

- Breakdowns establish a strong coordination template with hand-to-hand playing. Left-hand-lead practice improves the normal right-hand-lead by 20 to 30 percent.

- Two wrist turns for a diddle produced more physical control of the second note. Breakdowns force a player to learn the difficult point at which the brain must switch from two thoughts to one per diddle, an important maturation of mental concentration and coordination.

- Endurance. There is no “rest period” or “timeout.” Mental lapses place the discipline of many simultaneous factors in jeopardy: volume, position, accent power, timing, coordination, fatigue, and how to adjust to fatigue after peak speed during a *ritard*. Changing your grip due to fatigue is a risk. They played strong through the head and were in excellent physical condition.

- They learned perfect form at slow tempos, therefore able to drive when speeding.

- They learned to play with large motions, allowing their instructors a better view of physical errors. Large motions develop better coordination.

Breakdown drummers used the weight of their hands and forearms symmetrically, producing power and balanced dynamic volume. They were unbeatable except against each other.

Jay Tuomey: “All the great drummers cordially hated each other. It was war! Individuals were a dogfight! They were all great players. The Sons of Liberty had all the great rivals: Les Parks vs. George Ripperger and Perrilloux, Bobby Thompson vs. Hugh Quigley, Howard Keanally and Bill Pace...just a war.

There were great rivals. Some never talked to each other. Redican and Perrilloux would pal around together, but compete fiercely. Hugh Quigley was very gregarious and was liked by all. Les Parks could be aloof and arrogant at times but was a great player. Redican had a very wide-open style—high and open. He was a perfectionist. Frank Arsenault had big arm motion but was very fast—a very open style with high attacks. He was a human machine. Hugh and Frank both were perfectionists—drumming fanatics. Hugh was very smooth with speed—great execution. I would say it was Frank number one and Hugh number two as the best I ever saw. Connecticut, New York State, and Hudson Valley Field Day brought out the snare drummers against each other.” (Hugh Quigley won 60 snare titles, six Connecticut State Championships, two American Legion National Titles and 12 Northeast Titles.)

Al Linquity: “Redican was one of the greatest students Sturtze ever had. He was kind of aloof then. I mean everyone got along but it was WIN THAT MEDAL! Pretty fierce. Very fierce!”

John Flowers (Reading Buccaneers): “Redican was more powerful, but Arsenault was just a machine.”

Bobby Redican: “I always liked beat-

ing Frankie. He would go fast—fast but not steam clean. The judges that knew him let him get away with it. He was someone to target. I watched him quite a bit. I learned that way.”

Better drummers wrote their own solos, but New York had to pick selections from military camp duty, allowing Connecticut more difficult fillers. Redican used Flam Paradiddle Diddles and double accented Single and Double Paradiddles to win 46 of 70 contests. Solos were usually 1:30 to 1:45. The long roll was requisite with two more picked out of a hat by the first competitor or judge. One 2/4 and 6/8 piece was required. Breakdown errors were between one-fourth and two full points depending on severity.

Charley Poole: “You could be awarded up to one more point for “super speed” on your fastest breakdown speed. Many times, I would score over the maximum 25 points because of it. If the draw was the Triple Ratamacue or Flam Paradiddle-Diddle, it was a killer. Most couldn't do it well—kind of like Swiss Triplets hand to hand; a sign of manhood. My father would drive me to a contest in New York somewhere. Registration was at 8:00 p.m. It would go till 4:00 a.m. We would go out and get breakfast.”

North Branford Fife and Drum Corps



Sons of Liberty (l to r): Jay Tuomey, Bobby Thompson and Les Parks



COMPLIMENTS OF CAROL HOOTEN

1958 Reilly Raiders

won best drumline at the New York World's Fair competitions of 1939 and 1940. Five J. Burns Moore students were using dynamics like the Kirks. Ralph Colter: "We were the first line to do shading. The initial strokes of a seven were crescendoed into the accent. Eighth-note flams after this were very soft. Well, it caught on. There was no credit on the sheets for it, though, but for exhibitions, it was very effective."

Bill Reamer: "We played solos like 'Downfall of Paris,' 'The General,' and 'Connecticut Halftime.' Some made up their own. There must have been over a hundred drummers there that day. It was dominated by Connecticut. I took 13th place. It started early in the morning and went all day."

The 1940 American Legion National Junior Snare Drum Championship was an invitational contest of east versus west sponsored by Ludwig. George Lawrence Stone was the drum judges chairman, flanked by William F. Ludwig and J. Burns Moore. Connecticut dominated the order of finish: Bobby Redican, James Ryan, Mickey Stefanowitz, Sigmond Trybus, and Frank Arsenault. Vincent Mott was the highest placing western drummer, defeating William F. Ludwig Jr. Redican was 17, winning a \$75 red, white, and blue mother-of-pearl 12 x 16 drum, a lot of money at that time.

Recordings of the 1953 Charles T. Kirks and early 1950s Blessed Sacrament and Reilly Raiders make it very apparent that timing was skewed to add that little bit of superior Ancient flavor. As

novice players filled bugle corps ranks, the metered roll became standard. Ancients called it "cut drumming." Stop cheating! The Ancients 7- and 15-stroke roll attacks were delayed after the "and" of the beat without mathematical subdivision. They also held releases back to play 24th-note singles quicker—and out of meter—at phrase endings. Bugle corps tried this to no avail.

John Pratt: "I saw the Geneva Appleknockers in the 1948 and '49 seasons. They were doing 7's and 15's. Everyone else was doing 5's and 13's. They got killed for it."

As M&M corps learned the same rudiments and competitive pieces; they drifted away from centuries-old military beatings. Perilloux went to the Skyliners in 1953, liking the freedom of swing rhythms. During the 1930s and 1940s, most field drum lines marched eight or nine snares with four or five bass drums because regulation TR75-5 stipulated two bugles or three fifes for every snare drum.

Gabarina Post—the Skyliners—were last of the large champion lines before a 3-3-2 snare-tenor-bass ensemble became most efficient with harder rudiments and faster tempos under the tick system. A method had not yet been developed to train eight snares to execute difficult rudiment combinations cleanly.

Ed Olsen: "It was the fife and drum drummers that taught the M&M corps. They didn't get the fife and drum instruction until after the war. Then Garbarina came."

Bill Boerner (Gabarina/Skyliners): "It was the tempos that pushed 7-Stroke Rolls into 5's. We played many 7-Stroke Rolls, but at 128, those two extra notes would be crushed in. We had to drop it to 5's. We had eight snares in 1946, '47, and '48, Philly in '49, California in '50, and Missouri...actually till '54. We were winning: seven state and two national titles. We played all the 26 rudiments. Drum instructors were now in demand. I





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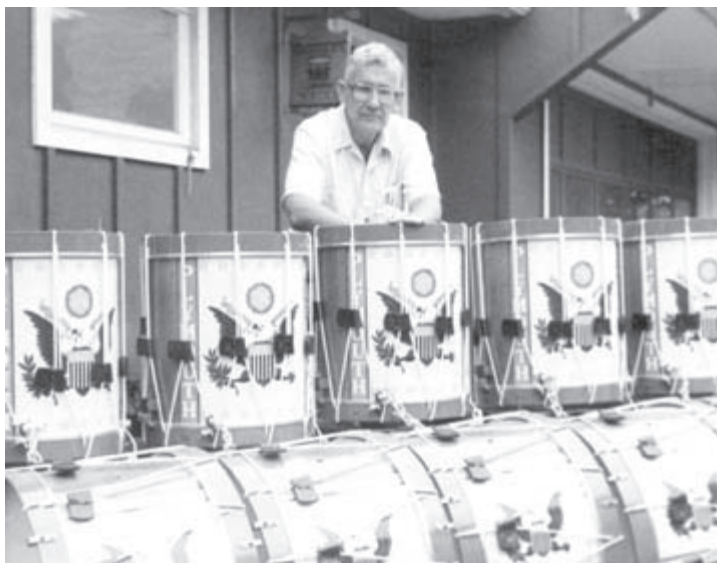
ended up teaching 15 to 20 corps myself."

Don Friesing (Skyliners): "At Sky we would get our drums level using string stretched across the line. There was an American Legion rule that stated the drums should be on a 45-degree angle. It's not physically possible to play with that severe an angle! We marched in two rows of four with the better drummers to the outside. Colonel Pierce, the instructor of Skyliners, would add syncopation to the parts between snares and tenors."

In 1947, Bill Reamer (VFW individual champion 1938, 1941, and 1946), did as the Ripperger brothers and packed his McCall Bluebird students and 8mm movie camera into his Volkswagen van to see the greatest players in the world at Connecticut musters, where Sturtze's winning students were on display. Earl had kept their phone numbers and called them after the war. Reamer brought the high

Connecticut style back to Pennsylvania, resulting in a national American Legion junior championship for the McCall Bluebirds in 1947—the first junior bugle corps to play Ratamacues—and the Osmond Hurricanes in 1948 and '49 for his students' line, John Dowlan. Fife and drum corps played Ratamacues before 1812.

Ed Olsen: "The fife and drum corps'



Bill Reamer

musters would attract all the great drummers from the past. At Westbrook, there would be a jam session after the corps performances with the younger kids trying to play faster and outdo each other. The old cats simply 'got the nod' and retired to Bobby Thompson's car. Hugh Quigley, Ken Lemley, Bill Pace, Bobby Thompson, Tuomey, Redican, Perrilloux—the boys—started their own music. It wasn't long before there were 20 or 30 kids gathered around staring at their drumming idols."

Bill Reamer: "J. Burns Moore and Sturtze students were picking the hands up. They also were the ones who usually won. In 1947, we did rudimental drum solos. I had Bill Maling and Don Mihok at Osmond. Many of the lines back then were doing 10 or 12 snares. It was not clean. They had to cut it down. They didn't play well. I cut the line to four and four with two bass. We did breakdowns in the Burns Moore style and used Stone book examples."

Bill Bernert (McCall Blue-

birds): "In 1947, Pop Martin [J Frank Martin] saw that Reamer was doing 'Connecticut Halftime' and 'Downfall of Paris' as drum solos on the field. No one had done that before. Martin went berserk! He couldn't believe what he was seeing! A lot of the lines were still playing rump-da-dum stuff. We were playing Ratamacues! We won drums. Reamer was way ahead of his time. He put rudiments in drum corps."

Don Mihok (Osmond Cadets, 1949 VFW Jr. Snare Champion): "Reamer taught us 'Troublemakers.' It was a tap six-stroke roll. No one had seen or done them then."

The "Rodney Dangerfield" of rudiments was the Six-Stroke Roll because Ancients thought it sounded like a Ratamacue. Why play a "6" when you can switch hands? It does not appear in historical military instruction books, and if it does, only as "practice material," which is odd considering its generous charging downbeat and easy execution. As tempos increased after the war, everybody learned the rudiment with no respect.

Before 1950, a judge could not pick up a dropped stick. Enter Bob Cotter, director of the Jersey Joes, Legion champions in 1948, second in '49. Nat Garratano (Jersey Joes): "At one contest at New Jersey State, one tenor drummer was not that good. Bob took an extra horn player and put him on tenor. He was to drop his stick and go on through the show and not play. Now, this bugler was a character. He

threw that stick about 20 yards. That same season, Bob took another guy who was not a tenor and had a doctor put his arm in a sling. It was done up perfectly! They got that rule changed because of him."

National titles won by Reilly Raiders' 1947 line (John Dowlan, Harry Ginther, and Charlie Cornelius), and Reamer's McCall Bluebirds (Bill Maling, Don Mihok, Jack Corey, and Jack Kasm) ended the World War I influence. To earn a snare spot in these senior and junior champions, you now needed rudimental style training, preferably when young. Reilly would tear through the 1950s, winning six national titles behind the strength of a serious and dedicated drumline that went to show sites a day early in their Irish green hearse. Drum major Wild Bill Hooten threw second-place trophies over the fence.

Bobby Redican: "Reilly Raiders in the early and late 1950s was a hell of a good line. Their tenor drummers were equally as competent. They could all duplicate parts so it sounded like the original recordings. Corps were playing the Boston Pops pieces then. Their drum solo was in the middle of the competition. You better believe they were clean!"

Charlie Cornelius (Reilly Raiders): "The first thing we would do at practice was go through all the rudiments. We did the open roll and broke it down. Doing breakdowns helped us interpret the rudiments to the music, and let me tell you, it was clean as a bell! The angle of

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Eric Perrilloux, Bobby Redican and Ken Mazur (October 2003)

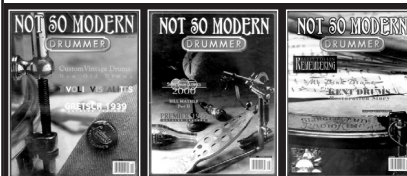
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the drum was now so you could beat into it instead of off it, especially the left hand."

Bob Adair (Reilly Raiders): "Many of us were raising families, so we had to practice at home. For a big show we had extra practices. It was a weekend thing. You had a job and raised your family."

The extended endurance of Harry Ginther's "Grey Ghost" (1958) Reilly Raider drum solo, influencing Fred Johnson's "Magoo" (1959), the Caballeros "The Bomb" (1960), and others broke tradition. A 13 1/2 minute show had time for two short drum solos and one long one. The famous "Grey Ghost" solo had extended rolls and Drags supported by tenor and bass notes.

Paul Mosley: "The 'Grey Ghost' was the national anthem of rudimental drumming. That kicked it off. You did not have drum solos with rolls and drags in those days." Palettes now widened so no two percussion arrangers would sound the same. Reilly didn't like tradition anyway, presenting a drum solo at the front of the field and sneaking rudiments in not from the "26."

Jay Tuomey: "The best M&M corps up till 1950 was the Reilly Raiders. There was nothing west of Philly at that time. They introduced new rudiments—very sharp. They had some guy they called Ghost as a drum sergeant." Harry Ginther named "The Grey Ghost" solo after Jimmy Giles.

Jimmy Giles: "We had two different drum instructors. Ginther was there, but Perrilloux was coming in from New Jersey. Eric Perrilloux was the tops! The three snares didn't like each other all the time. Sometimes we would complain and moan. We had different styles. After three or four years of playing together you get to know each other. We would argue about who made a mistake! No one ever made them! There were marks on the score sheet but no one made them! It wasn't me!"

Unlike Kirk and Reilly, the Sons of Liberty Fife and Drum Corps (1947–1968) demanded everyone play one style in the early 1950s. Juilliard alumnus Les Parks ran the corps and taught the drum line, assisted by Bobby Thompson. They used Sturtze's arm motion with a rigid middle finger and curled

pinky on the left hand. Les brought dynamics to the Sons in 1950. Competitors thought this a bad idea, but everyone was using dynamics next season. Tuomey says that Sturtze used to "scalp" them because they were not dynamically "by the book." Parks—the innovator—was turning pages faster than Sturtze wanted to read.

Jay Tuomey (Sons of Liberty): "Parks was very inventive using Swiss, Lesson 25 and Pada-fla-fla rudiments in the early 1950s. My dealings with Sturtze were informal. He played with a [left] half thumb. This was not as precise as Les Parks, who used all index finger and no thumb. The [curled] pinky acts like a pendulum, turning the left hand down. It changes the center of gravity of the entire hand and keeps the left hand from going flat. Les would stand on table-tops and look down at all the styles. He used a big mirror as well and spent hours on the perfection of the left-hand turn. So did Sturtze. One common element was to move the sticks in the same plane; VERY IMPORTANT!"

Marty Hurley (Blessed Sacrament): "When the pinky finger is back it forms a better bridge for the stick to rest on. The ring finger is less likely to move. Les and Bobby spent hours perfecting the technique. They wanted a method that had the left hand under more control."

Jack Cassidy (Reilly Raiders): "The Reilly Raiders played similar to Bobby Thompson's style but without the left grip. We didn't do the pinky thing. We didn't see a benefit to it until we sat down with Bobby and he showed us the benefit of the style. We tried it and it works!"

Parks reduced stick angles from 55 degrees to 45 degrees or slightly less, taking better advantage of the human muscle and bone system, much closer to the center of gravity of the body, resulting in more power and control. Elbows are now at the back of the back, not extended "around the tree." Another Sons of Liberty contribution is the hand angle on the wrist hinge. The "S" or "power train" is formed when a flat right wrist moves to the right, from the tip of the thumb to the wrist hinge and the wrist hinge up the forearm, then straight to the shoulder. Go left and you play more like they did in 1920 on

a much lower drum. It was the last piece of the physics puzzle. With it, Bobby Thompson's Blessed Sacrament junior line immediately started to dominate in 1954 with their first national title.

Bill Reamer believed Audubon's 1954 all-girl corps had raw talent. The Audubon Bon Bons won the drum quartet competition in 1956 and took high drums at the '57 Atlantic City nationals. A female line of 18-year old high school seniors gained peer respect by beating everybody. Everyone says you could set your watch by the breakdowns of 1957 National Snare Champion Rita Macy.

Rita (Macy) Bernert: "We were always together and liked to be on top. We really hated band. In corps you always try to do better than your last show. You needed dedicated practice. I always practiced one or two hours a day. The people next door weren't too happy! My brothers were ready to shoot me! I liked it. It's in you. I wanted to be perfect. Bill Reamer wrote my snare solo, 'The Rita Macy Special.' It had fancy 6/8 stuff in it. Dan Mihok in the seniors used the same solo. Reamer wrote some rudiments that didn't even have names! I beat John Flowers and all those from the west—the guys from Cavies. Men are always cocky! I lost by two tenths in '56. St. Vinnie guys said that their guy won on his hand salute—that mine didn't look as good. Were they kidding or was it true? Who knows? You have to pay some dues, you know?"

John Flowers: "I saw Rita in '57. She wiped my socks! Man, she had excellent rolls!"

Charles Ellison (St. Vincent Cadets, 1956 National Snare Champion): "Bobby Thompson got Les [Parks] to come over to our corps. He was with us from 1954 to '58. Les kept the arm in. It was all forearm. We practiced all 26 rudiments. The middle finger was straight on the left hand. The right hand had a grip between the thumb and forefinger. We all learned drumming before Les came, so our styles were a bit different. Les had a dry sense of humor. He was very scholarly about drumming. He approached it as music. There was no backsticking then—no twirls—but you could improvise in your solo."

The plastic heads used by the 1957 Cavaliers to win a very humid Miami fi-

nals would save many hours of tuning and practice time, yet have a similar sound and technique. Calfskin could lose its tension in eight measures, "turning into pizza." Plastic kept its tension. Sort of...

Ron Marcquenski (Cavaliers): "We were a test corps. When Frank [Arsenault] got there he would bring new stuff over—plastic heads. We ripped them and cracked them—too hard, too soft. We were denting them, splitting them."

The metal hoop for plastic was much lower than the wood of a rope-tension drum. Now John Dowlan's "stretching exercise" could be used, something called "backsticking." A girl might get to play snare if she could find another girl to "balance" the line on each side. Devon Grammar School had such an occurrence.

Veronica (Bentze) Sturtze (Winner, Feminine Class—1940 New York World's Fair, Connecticut Senior and Northeastern States Champion): "In the contests, we did breakdowns and you didn't know which rudiments would be picked. So I took my drum to school. The principal would send up notes telling me to stop. Teachers would say, 'She doesn't know when to stop! She doesn't know how to stop!' When I was 17 years old, the Lyrics Theatre had talent shows. There were 35 more people in it! I played the long roll and solo. My father cried; 'That's my daughter!' This was during the Depression. I won five dollars and gave it to my mother. I went into [individual] competitions. A few times I beat the guys. I had many second prizes. I can still drum. It gets in your blood, you know."

It certainly does.

17. Sturtze, Section 1

18. Bompa, p. 40

**Ken Mazur** was mentored by Jay Tuomey of the Sons of Liberty Fife and Drum Corps and John Wallace of Detroit's Johnny Wallace Big Band and Orchestra. He received further instruction from Bobby Thompson, Mark Petty, and Marty Hurley. Ken won many Michigan drumset and snare titles, then captured the 1976 DCI World Snare Drum Championship representing the Phantom Regiment. After instructing in Rockford and authoring books, he served as percussion caption head and president of the Michigan judges circuit. His book, *The Perfectionists: The History of Rudimental Snare Drumming*, will soon be complete.

PN



Veronica (Bentze) Sturtze

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