

Building the Concert Snare Drummer Through Etudes

By Lee Vinson

There is now more than 100 years' worth of study material for concert snare drum, the majority of which has been authored by orchestral percussionists with the aim of training the next generation of performers. To that end, it is worth taking a brief look at the history of such resources in preparation for our Snare Drum Etude Lab at PASIC16.

This is not intended to be an all-inclusive history of snare drum methods or a comprehensive listing of snare drum etude books. The focus here is specifically on etudes, not necessarily complete method books for snare drum. Also not included here are highly valuable technical resources including George Lawrence Stone's all-important *Stick Control*. We should all start there.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Snare drum etudes came about because there was a need for them. Etudes for violin and piano have existed for several hundred years, as the history of these instruments is much lengthier than our own. These collections of etudes were geared largely towards preparing students of those instruments to perform the virtuosic solo repertoire at the highest level.

Material geared towards training concert percussionists—and more specifically, orchestral snare drummers—is a fairly modern phenomenon. There certainly existed some previous training material for drummers, but most of it revolved around military traditions. This makes sense, as the drum has a much longer history as a tool of the military than an instrument of classical music.

It is logical that much of our study material for orchestral snare drum would have to be written by percussionists familiar with performing in symphony orchestras. After all, they spend a great deal of time playing the instrument in their line of work. It would not be an overstatement to say concert snare drum pedagogy has largely been authored by orchestral percussionists for orchestral percussionists.

Before there were etude collections for snare drum, there were attempts at writing comprehensive methods for concert percussion, which, of course, contained etudes. Among an early wave of such published methods in America was Harry Bower's *Imperial Method for the Drum* (1898). A member of the Boston Symphony from 1904 to 1907, Bower was one of the first to include instruction on mallet percussion—and timpani in his method.

Many more like-minded publications were to follow including Frank E. Dodge's *Dodge Drum School* (1909), *The Harry A. Bower System for the Drums, Bells, Xylophone, and Timpani in Three Parts* (1911), Carl Gardner's *Progressive Studies for the Snare Drum* (1919), Simon Sternburg's *Modern Drum Studies* (1933) and Benjamin Podemski's *Standard Snare Drum Method* (1940). These are only a few examples. A much more complete listing of snare drum books dating back to the mid nineteenth century can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Percussion* edited by John H. Beck.

By the mid twentieth century, orchestral percussionists were writing books aimed specifically at those learning the art of orchestral snare drumming. The list of authors includes prominent members of some

of America's great symphony orchestras: Morris Goldenberg's *Modern School for Snare Drum* (1955), Emil Sholle's *Here's the Drum* (1959), and Al Payson's *Snare Drum in the Concert Hall* (1970). All of these valuable methods are somewhat more comprehensive in their instruction rather than merely offering a series of etudes, each including sections on such general topics as how to count rhythms, how to hold the sticks, how to care for the instruments, and excerpts from the orchestral repertoire.

Books containing only etudes are a more recent concept. The assumption here would be that students have previously worked through other primary training material. A progression of studies will always prove more beneficial when accompanied by additional technical exercises and good musical input from a qualified private teacher.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Not necessarily technical exercises, and not often rising to the level of viable recital pieces, these etudes provide valuable study material through which to apply the technical and musical lessons learned elsewhere and offer the opportunity to expand upon those lessons in a longer format.



Lee VINSON

Friday, Nov. 11, 11:00 A.M.

Symphonic Snare Lab

It is quite popular for symphonic percussionists to model their etudes after thematic material from the orchestral repertoire. These study pieces then lend themselves to helping one become familiar with snare drum as it is used in the symphonic repertoire. But in addition, these etudes intend to provide source material for young players as they learn the instrument, whether or not their end game is to become a full-time symphony orchestra musician. Resources such as these have rich pedagogical value to any percussionist.

PASIC16 SNARE DRUM LAB

During our Snare Drum Lab at PASIC16 we will be performing and discussing well-known snare drum etudes from some of the more widely used concert snare drum etude books including Mitchell Peters' *Intermediate Snare Drum Studies* (1976), Anthony Cirone's *Portraits in Rhythm* (1966), and Jaques Delecluse's *Douze Etudes pour Caisse-Claire* (1964). As we perform these etudes together, we will pose many questions.

From the perspective of the performer, what are the musical takeaways from any given etude? What technical challenges are presented, and what are some possible tools to conquer these challenges? What theme or source material inspired this particular etude, and how does that influence our interpretation? What would one do differently with a given etude in an orchestra audition when these etudes are asked?

And from the perspective of the educator, how can we mix and match etudes from different sources to provide a more comprehensive course of study for students? How can we best use these etudes in a pedagogical setting where the end game isn't necessarily to build professional orchestral percussionists?

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, our time together at PASIC will prove valuable for students and teachers alike, both those with an orchestral aim and those with a more general viewpoint. The intention is to have everyone come away from the session with a new perspective on concert snare drum etude pedagogy. Above all, we hope to enjoy the process of performing and learning together in front of an eager audience at this year's convention in Indianapolis. I hope to see you there!

W. Lee Vinson is a former member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the United States Navy Band and has performed with the orchestras of Toronto, Detroit, Houston, and Colorado. A devoted music educator, Vinson has served on the applied music faculty of Boston University, the University of Kansas, and in 2014 as a sabbatical replacement at the Eastman School of Music. **PN**

PASIC 2016 Symphonic Labs

First introduced at PASIC 2001, Symphonic Labs are instructional, hands-on sessions for percussion students focusing in orchestral music. The presenter of each Lab demonstrates and performs for a portion of the 50 minute session, during which selected student players perform and receive helpful critique from the presenter.

The 2016 Symphonic Labs presenters are:

Lee Vinson – Snare
Pedro Fernandez – Keyboard
Brian Jones – Timpani
Keith Aleo – Tambourine
Sam Bacco – Cymbals

How to Participate

- 1) Become a PAS VIP or All Access Subscriber and receive discounted PASIC16 Registration!
- 2) Register for PASIC16! (All participants must be registered for PASIC16 in order to be placed on the sign-up list.)
- 3) Email Nels Vangen: intern@pas.org, with your name, PAS Member ID (if applicable), phone number, and what lab(s) you would like to participate in (you may participate in multiple labs).

Symphonic Lab sign-ups are on a first-come, first-served basis, and there are 5 spots available in each lab. If you the lab you are interested in is full, you will be placed on a waitlist.