

RUDIMENTAL DRUMMING IN THE UNITED STATES, 1860-1900

by Donald Gilbert

About the Author:

Mr. Gilbert holds a B.M. degree from Eastman and a M.M. degree from Michigan State University. He has done advanced graduate study at the University of Michigan. He has had considerable performance experience and numerous publications. Presently Mr. Gilbert is instrumental music director at Whiteford Agriculture Schools, Ottawa Lake, Michigan.

The Civil War marked the high point for the rudimental style of drumming in the United States. It was a mobile war. Whole armies covered much ground on the forced march, fought their battles and often retired in quick retreat. Musically, it was really a drummer boy's war, for it was he who called the great formations to battle, tapped the camps to sleep and, together with the fifes, set the cadence for those long and weary marches. For many young boys, enlisting as a drummer or fifer was the only way to get into the fight, since the minimum age for the draft, at least in the Union Army, was eighteen.¹

Although at the beginning of the War, many Union regiments had complete bands, the necessity of using bandsmen on the firing line soon depleted their ranks. After 1862, the drum and fife corps offered the only dependable source of music in many of the regiments. As in the War for Independence and succeeding wars, all formations and calls, from reveille to taps, were announced by the drummer boys, often to the accompaniment of the fife.²

The esteem in which drummers and fifers were held can be seen in the following news article taken from the Sacramento Daily Union, dated May 8, 1863:

In the First and Eleventh Corps drums and trumpets or fifes are the only martial music, and it is preferred by the men for marching as being firmer and more accurate. In some of these Drum corps I counted eighty snare drums and thirty trumpets; and in others there were seventy-five or eighty drums and half that number of fifes and piccolos. The reader who has not heard such a band can scarcely imagine the florid and inspiring effect of the roll and beat of so large a number of drums, intermingled with the martial blare of the trumpet and the shriek of the ear piercing fife.³

Several important drum method books were published in the latter half of the nineteenth century which greatly influenced the direction of rudimental drumming in the twentieth century. The first of these books was *Drummer and Fifer's Guide* by George B. Bruce, prin-

principal drum instructor at the school of practice, Governor's Island, New York, and Daniel D. Emmett, fifer and composer of the famous *Dixie*.⁴ Twentieth century percussionists refer to this book as the Bruce and Emmett method. This method was quite similar to Charles Ashworth's method of 1812. The first rudiment listed in the Bruce and Emmett method is the double stroke or "Da-Da-Ma-Ma" roll. The roll is notated, however, with an accent on the second beat of the open roll. Furthermore, each rudiment including the double stroke roll was to be played slowly at first (open), accelerate to a reasonable speed (close), and decelerate to the original tempo (open). The Bruce and Emmett method received wide distribution for approximately the next forty years.⁵

The second important method book was the *System of Instruction for the Drum and Fife* written by Gardner A. Strube. This book published in 1869, was adopted for use in the United States Army.⁶ The Strube method differed from the Bruce and Emmett method only slightly; however, it was these slight differences which led to the formation of the National Association of Rudimental Drummers in 1932. The double stroke roll, which is still the first lesson, is played with no accent on the second beat. Furthermore, Strube did not feel it necessary to open any of the rudiments after they had been closed.⁷ The notation of the rudiments was designed to show the fingering (sticking). Strube used the fourth space for left hand strokes, the first space for right hand strokes and the third space for rolls beginning with the left hand and ending with the right.⁸

The Strube book lists twenty-five rudiments which he calls lessons. His method was used extensively in the eastern part of the country, particularly in New England.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the bugle replaced the fife as the accompanying instrument to the drum. The emphasis now shifted from the drum and fife corps to the drum and bugle corps. Out of this change came the need for a new method book. In 1886, John Philip Sousa published his book entitled simply *The Trumpet and Drum*.⁹ Essentially, it followed the format of the earlier method books written for drum and fife. It lists the rudiments, various duty calls, and drum beatings. The fife tunes in the older method books, of course, have been rewritten to fit the peculiarities of the bugle. This book soon became the guide for all service drummers.¹⁰ The Sousa method along with the Strube method and the Bruce and Emmett method remained stable fixtures in the percussionist's world, long into the twentieth century.

References

1. *The Civil War, Fort Sumter to Gettysburg*, Vol. I. Record note accompanying Mercury record No. LPs2-501. p. 6.
2. William Carter White, *A History of Military Music in America*, (New York: Exposition Press, 1944), p. 71.

3. Kenneth A. Bernard, *Lincoln and the Music of the Civil War*, (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1966), p. 134.
4. W. F. Ludwig, Sr., "The Development of Drum Rudiments," *The Ludwig Drummer*, V (Spring 1965), p. 16.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
8. Carl E. Gardner, *Modern Method for Percussion*, (New York: Carl Fischer Inc., 1919), p. 96.
9. W. F. Ludwig, Sr., p. 16.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

The Challenge

PAS NATIONAL CONFERENCE PROGRESS REPORT

PASNC March 26/27, 1974 at California State University Northridge campus.

Chartered bus transportation is planned to run from Anaheim Convention Center to CSUN Campus.

Holiday Inn and other motel housing available in Northridge from \$12/\$14 single, \$14/\$20 double. Lower rates available for early reservations. Anybody wishing to take advantage of early reservation rates, notify L.S. McCausland, 17610 Community St., Northridge, Ca. 91324; with dates inclusive, type of room, number in party.

PAS has commissioned William Kraft to compose a percussion ensemble work commemorating the first PAS National Conference. The commissioned work will be performed in a program presented by the Los Angeles Percussion Ensemble, conducted by the composer William Kraft.

Other highlights of this two day conference will feature clinics by Gary Burton and Roy Burns, presented in solo context with the Falconaires Jazz/Rock Ensemble.

Other events planned are "Marching Percussion Clinic and Workshop"; Harry Partch music program, conducted by Danlee Mitchell of California State Univ. San Diego; panel discussion of composers and their use of percussion; elementary, jr. high, high school percussion ensemble clinic and performance PAS California chapter sponsored "all western states percussion festival" competition finals, consisting of seven performing categories of drum set; timpani; keyboard; orchestra snare drum; rudimental snare drum; solo multiple percussion; and percussion ensemble; all categories in two divisions; high school and college.

Any one wishing to present their elementary, jr. high school, or high school percussion ensemble please forward a tape recording of their program to the PASNC Planning Committee for consideration. Any other performing groups desiring to participate may also submit a tape for consideration.