

BASIC PERCUSSION TECHNIQUE THROUGH THE STUDY OF THE SNARE DRUM

■ HISTORICAL ORIGINS

The use of an instrument that today we would call a drum is evident in most civilizations throughout history. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the most common form of drum in Europe was the *tabor*, which was the immediate predecessor of today's side drum or snare drum.¹ Referred to as side drums because they hung at the player's side from a shoulder strap or waist belt, these early snare drums existed in many different sizes and shapes. In general, they were double-headed rope-tuned drums and by the sixteenth century had cords, or snares, stretched across the bottom head. As portrayed by Rembrandt in his famous painting *The Night Watch* (1642), these side drums hung at a 45 degree angle at the player's side, and because of this position the traditional grip was adopted for playing.² As many other pictorial accounts document, traditional grip (left-hand stick hold) had its origin in European side drum playing as a means for accommodating the angle of the suspended drum.

By the early eighteenth century the snare drum was finally heard, *ad libitum* (as the performer chooses), in the orchestra through such works as Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Royal Fireworks Music* (1749).³ Though the drum was perhaps used first in Marais's opera *Alcione* (1706), it was Rossini who really brought the snare drum to solo rank in his overture to *La Gazza Ladra* (1817). Because of this, or for merely perhaps reintroducing the snare drum into the orchestra, he was nicknamed "Tamburossini."⁴

In the military the snare drum became a companion of the fife. Fife and drum guilds of high-ranking officials existed as early as 1332 in Basle, Switzerland. The instrument combination spread from Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to colonial America, where in 1775 it became the Minute Men's call to arms. The colonial drummer's and fifer's duties were to give orders in battle, announce the daily camp activities, and entertain by accompanying impromptu dances at night. The fife was replaced by the bugle during the Civil War, but the drummer's instrument, training, and playing style remained quite similar to that of his European ancestor. Many tutors throughout the eighteenth century offered instructions and recommendations for military side drumming but always combined with and in relation to the bugle or fife melody.

One of the earliest American books on instruction for fife and drum, written in 1812 by Charles Steward Ashworth, contained 28 drum rudiments. The complete title of Ashworth's book is *A New, Useful and Complete System of Drum Beating, Including the Reveille, Troop, Officers Calls, Signals, Salutes and the Whole of the Camp Duty as Practiced at Head-*

quarters, Washington City; Intended Particularly for the Use of the United States Army and Navy.⁵ This work aided the drummer, along with the continuing system of rote learning, in memorizing the many rudiments, camp duties, calls, solos, and fife accompaniments.⁶

Another important early drum and fife manual was the *Drummer's and Fifer's Guide* of 1862 and 1865 by George B. Bruce (drummer) and Daniel Emmett (fifer), author of *Dixie*.⁷ It is interesting to note that 74 of the 96 pages in the 1865 edition contained field signals, duty music, and marching tunes, with the fife and drum parts always written together, a practice that disappeared early in the twentieth century, much to the musical detriment of the young studying drummer. Many marching and military style drum instruction books appeared during the 1800s in America, including the popular *Strube Drum and Fife Instructor* of 1869 and Sousa's *Trumpet and Drum* of 1886. In the early 1900s drum instructors around the country were writing books on drum and other percussion instruction. Authors such as Harry A. Bower, Edward B. Straight, Carl E. Gardner, Sanford A. "Gus" Moeller, J. Burns Moore, George B. Stone and his son George Lawrence Stone, and many others contributed greatly to the early pedagogical growth of percussion in America. (See the *Encyclopedia of Percussion*, edited by John H. Beck, *Appendix C: Published Writings on Methods for Percussion* by James Strain for a complete listing of early books.)

At the close of World War I (1918) the American Legions and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) began sponsoring the first drum and bugle corps contests and furthering the development of drumming in this country. As more systems appeared for teaching and playing rudimental and orchestral styles of drumming, the need developed for standardization of a set of American drum rudiments to provide uniformity in drumming technique and execution. In 1933 the National Association of Rudimental Drummers (NARD) was formed. This organization, comprised of prominent drum teachers from around the country, established 26 American drum rudiments that helped to develop the techniques of rudimental-style drumming in most of this country's school drummers (see Chapter 9 for more on rudimental drumming). Today the study of the drum rudiments is generally integrated into the marching percussion arena and many other areas of percussion (for example, drum set) as the focus on percussion education has turned more toward total percussion study and performance.

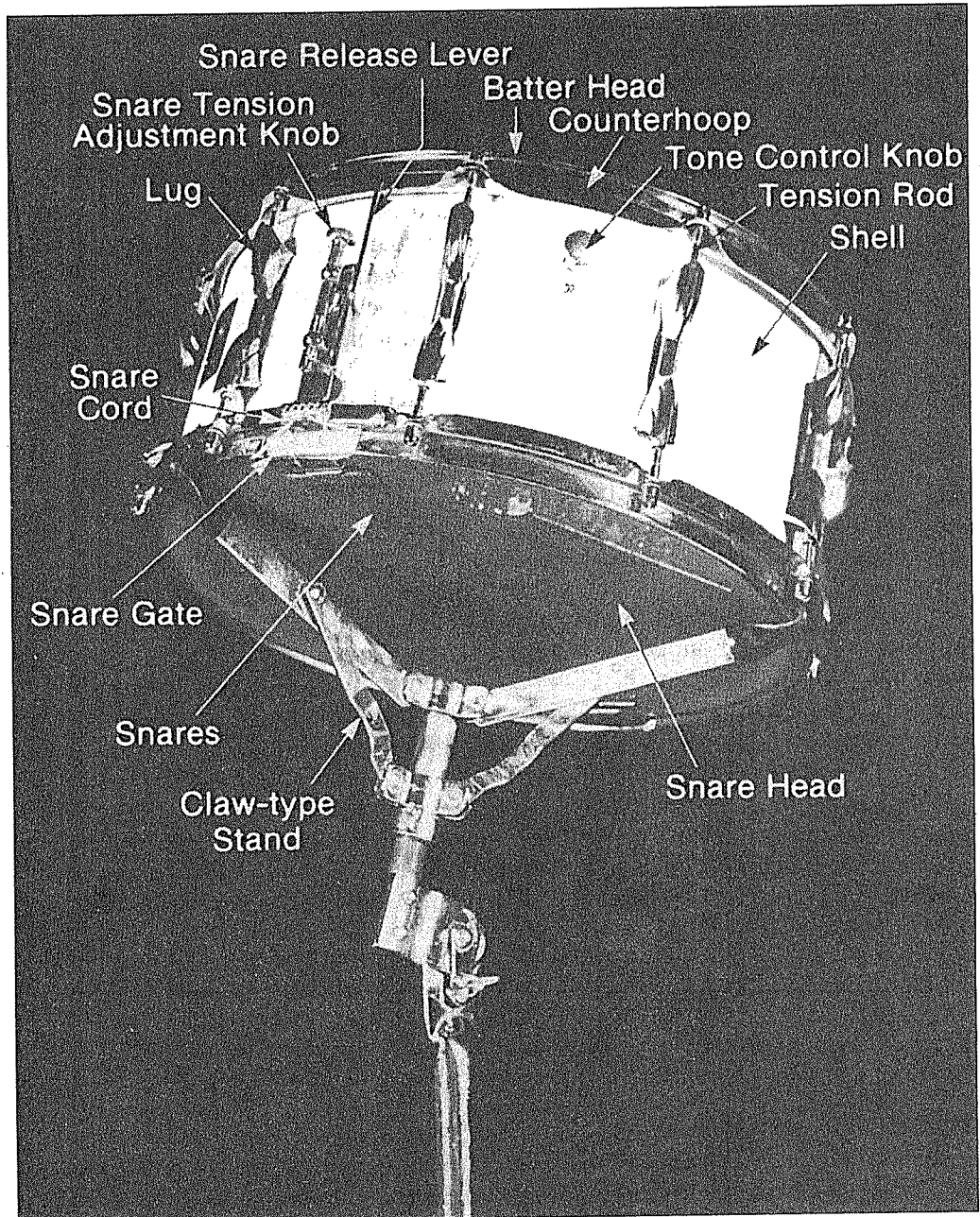
■ THE SNARE DRUM

Construction

The parts of the snare drum (*cassa* or *tamburo piccolo* [It.], *kleine trommel* [Ger.], *caisse claire* [Fr.]) are identified in Figure 2.1. Snare drum shells are made of metal, wood, or fiberglass materials. Generally, a metal drum produces a brighter sound than wood. A wood drum with a natural finish or with a durable plastic covering is practical for general school use. Additional drums should be considered that are made of metal and with various snare configurations. The approximate sizes of concert snare drums, given in depth times shell diameter, range from the piccolo—3" × 13" or 4" × 14"—to the standard drums—5" × 14" or 6½" × 14". (Smaller snare drums are used in some drum set outfits; see Chapter 8.)

Heads While all drum heads originally were made from animal skins, usually calf or goat, since the late 1950s heads have also been made of plastic or polyester film. Plastic heads are unaffected by changes in weather and are recommended for today's general school use. Skin heads are still used by many professionals, but due to the cost of good skin heads and the extra care involved in their use, they are not practical for school snare drum use. Many new developments in head construction and materials by leading drum head manufacturers—such as Remo's Renaissance®, FiberSkyn®, Suede®, Nuskyn®, and Evans's Strata®—are resulting in mellower, more skinlike sound and feel than is possible with ordinary plastic heads.

FIGURE 2.1
The parts of a snare drum



Every head consists of two parts: the head and the attached ring called the *flesh hoop*. The name "flesh hoop" is derived from tucking animal skin around it when skin (flesh) heads are used. There are three basic methods for attaching a head to the flesh hoop. Many drum head manufacturers use an interlocking, crimp-type method for mounting the plastic, or skin, into the metal flesh hoops on at least some of the heads. Most Remo heads are manufactured by perforating the edge of the plastic and then epoxy gluing it into the metal flesh hoop. Other manufacturers fasten the head into an epoxy flesh hoop, which results in practically a one-piece construction of head and hoop.

The *collar* of any head is the area around the circumference that extends over the top bearing edge of the shell before meeting the flesh hoop. This area is usually $\frac{1}{2}$ " to $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide and is preformed on most plastic heads.

Plastic drum heads are made in a vast assortment of thicknesses and materials—from standard polyester film to bullet-proof Kevlar.

The *batter* head is the head that is played. Thicknesses range from 5 mils (1 mil = 1/1000 inch) to 15 mils two-ply heads. For general concert snare drum use, a medium weight (8–10 mils) plastic coated head is recommended. Many of the specialty heads (for example, FiberSkyn and Renaissance) are also good. A coated head is necessary for brush playing. The *snare head* is the bottom head on a snare drum and should be as thin as possible (2–3 mils) as it responds only to the air waves set into motion inside the drum by a stroke on the batter head.

Drum heads are made in many varieties and with more and more special features. Many new drum head manufacturers are appearing on the world market with innovative designs and construction that warrant serious consideration by students and directors. Catalogs and websites of Remo and Evans, the two largest drum head manufacturers, and others offer details on head construction and recommended uses. (See www.remo.com and www.evansdrumheads.com.)

Counterhoop The *counterhoop* is the outside chrome or wooden (bass drums) ring that holds the head on the drum. It is held in place with tension rods. These bolt-type rods screw into the lugs or tension rod casings that are fastened to the shell.

Snares The *snares* are the strands of wire, gut, nylon, nylon-coated cable, synthetic gut, or combination of these materials that are stretched across the bottom snare head. Wire snares are adequate for general purpose concert use. Gut or cable snares, while absolutely necessary on the marching snare drum, also expand the tonal dimension of the concert section. Gut or cable is much crisper and articulate than wire and will musically enhance any march when paired with the standard wire snare. Gut/wire combination snares are also available. The purchase of different size drums and different snares is strongly encouraged when adding a third or fourth concert snare drum to the percussion section.

Snare Adjustment The tension of the snares is adjusted by the *snare tension adjustment knob* (see Figure 2.1). Many elaborate mechanisms have been developed by manufacturers for snare adjustment. Most important is that the snares lie evenly across the snare head and tension evenly when adjusted. While greater sensitivity is possible with snares extending completely across the head, a conventional tie-on snare will suffice. Budget, care, and tuning time will determine the elaborateness of snare assemblies preferred.

Snare Release The *snare release lever* allows the performer to release the snares from the snare head. This is necessary to avoid sympathetic vibration on the snares from other sounding instruments and to change to a tom tom sound when “snares off” or “muffled” is called for in the music. This mechanism must work smoothly and quietly for efficient snare drum performance. The entire snare assembly of snare adjustment knob and snare release lever is called the *snare strainer*.

Care and Maintenance

All percussion instruments should be stored in a locked percussion cabinet or other area when not in use to protect them from damage or theft. Snares should be left *on* to avoid shrinking or warping (in the case of gut) and to avoid possibly getting bent when moving or setting up. If their sympathetic vibration is distracting, a folded piece of paper can be inserted between the head and the snares to stop them from rattling while in storage. Plastic heads should be cleaned periodically with spray cleaner, or if extremely dirty a mild cleanser can be used. Care should be taken not to allow dirt down into the collar

area along the counterhoop. Metal and wood shells can be cleaned with a damp cloth. Polishing creams are not recommended for metal shells as it is extremely difficult to remove all the polish around the lugs and snare strainer. If a lug, tension rod, or other part of the drum becomes inoperable through wear or damage, it should be repaired or replaced.

Heads should be replaced even though they may not be broken! A head used regularly has an average life of about a year at the most. Constant use, especially loud playing, will cause a head to stretch out and the center to become insensitive or "dead" to stick response. Heads in this condition or with excessive dents, small cuts, or holes should be replaced. General head-replacing procedures as outlined at the end of Chapter 1 should be followed. Be certain to clean and lubricate the tension rods and lugs well with a light lubrication grease or Latin-Percussion's Lug-Lube. A drop of oil on the snare strainer mechanism might be advisable also. Lubrication on the top edge of the shell is *not* necessary; however, a light film of baby talcum powder will allow for easier tuning. Greasy or wet substances should not be used as they reduce the free vibrations of the head and will soak into wooden shells.

Occasionally a metallic ring will be heard inside a drum. This is often the small spring inside the lug that rings when the drum is played. Remove the head(s), unscrew the lugs from inside the drum, and pack a small cotton ball around the spring. A few drops of oil on the cotton ball will avoid absorption of moisture and rusting of the spring over the years.

Conventional tie-on snares must be attached with thin snare cord available at any music store, or strong very thin braided fishing line may be used. A piece of shoe string or leather will cause the end of the snares to be raised too far off the snare head and result in a buzzing of the snares at any tension, and in general a poor sound. A good snare drum sound can be achieved only with good snares that are adjusted properly. Many times the soldering job on wire tie-on snares is uneven where the wires are fastened to the two metal end-plates. The snare wires should lie evenly between these end-plates, and the amount of solder should be minimal and as smooth as possible. When buying new snares, this must be scrupulously checked until a perfect set of snares is found; otherwise the snares will not lie evenly on the snare head. Often a little clever work with a file, smoothing out a poor soldering job, can greatly improve a snare sound. Also, snares can be purchased with plastic end-plates that many times have a more even fastening of the wires to the end-plates than the metal type.

Tuning

To obtain a characteristically good concert snare drum sound, the batter head should be tuned to a tension that produces a good stick rebound. This may vary according to head thickness but in general will be something less than a "table top" response but not loose and sluggish. Many symphonic percussionists tune about the pitch A on a 14" concert snare with medium-weight batter heads. Experimentation with different head tensions will eventually result in the tension required. Model a fine snare drum sound on an orchestral or concert band recording (or the accompanying DVD).

Assuming a medium-weight batter head and thin-weight snare head are used, the snare head should then be tuned to a higher sounding pitch than the batter head. How much higher will be determined by personal preference in sound concept and music being played. Although sounding higher than the batter head, the snare head is thinner than the batter head and should therefore feel looser. Care must be taken to fine tune or clear each head by adjusting the head tension and pitch at each tension rod to as close the same pitch as possible. This is accomplished throughout the mounting of the head by softly tapping the head at each point directly in front of the tension rod, listening, and tightening or loosening to match the head pitch accordingly (always tuning in opposite pairs). Periodic checking of fine tuning on any drum is necessary to keep the head vibrating evenly and to obtain the best sound available. By cultivating a good

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concept of snare drum tone through listening to live and recorded professionals and with a little experimentation, the director and students will quickly learn how to achieve and maintain professional quality snare drum sounds.

The snare tension should be adjusted somewhat according to the passage played. A loud passage might require a slight tightening of the snares as compared to a looser sound desired for a soft delicate passage. The use of different drums for different passages could also be considered. For all-purpose playing, however, the snare tension should be adjusted while softly tapping the head with the stick until a crisp snare response is achieved. Too much tensioning of the snares will result in a choked, almost tom tom sound, as the snares cannot respond properly. Great care must be exercised in obtaining the proper snare tension. See and hear a demonstration of this snare tension tuning on the DVD for Chapter 2.

Many older drums have an internal *tone control*, which is used to eliminate unwanted overtone ring. If used, this felt pad should be adjusted until it just barely touches the batter head and eliminates the ring. Too often this device is over-tightened, causing a raised spot on the head and thus destroying all fine tuning. Correct adjustment of the tone control can best be achieved with the snares off by softly tapping the batter head off center with a stick and gradually tightening the tone control knob until the unwanted ring is barely eliminated. Many new developments in head design have reduced the need for tone control use. These newer overtone reduction heads should be considered for achieving desired sounds without the use of internal tone controls and external muffling. (Dot heads and two-ply heads are not recommended for concert snare drum use.)

Stands

Snare drum should be of sturdy construction and adjustable to a standing height for concert snare drum playing. Stands intended for drum set use will not adjust high enough for a student much over 5½ feet tall. When ordering, be certain to specify a long shaft for concert use. (See discussion of this on the DVD.)

Two basic types of stands exist: the claw type and the conventional single-arm adjustment type. Set up the conventional type with the adjustable arm to the player's left. This will allow the drum to rest on the two stationary arms and the adjustable length to be secured against the drum. Either type of stand should be set up so that the drum can be slanted for traditional grip playing. (See demonstration of this on the DVD.)

Placement of the drum on the stand is recommended with the snare release level at about 4 or 5 o'clock as the player faces the instrument. This is to allow for quick access to the snare release with the right hand and the most versatile playing area selection (see the discussion of "Playing Areas" below and under "The Strokes" at the end of this chapter). Consistent positioning of the snare release is highly advantageous to a percussion section's successful performance when it comes to everyone knowing where the snare release lever is on the snare drums.

Sticks

Snare drum sticks are generally made of wood but are also available in metal and fiberglass-type materials. Stick recommendations are made in Chapter 1. Selection of sticks should include the following actions:

1. Roll the sticks on a flat surface to find a pair that is straight.
2. Drop the sticks on a hard floor or tap them on a hard surface to match their pitch. Choose the pair with the highest matched pitch.
3. Inspect the sticks to be certain the weights and diameters are closely matched and general finishes are smooth and free of flaws.

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Figure 2.2 identifies the parts of the snare drum stick. Wooden sticks are recommended for all-purpose use. The weight and size of a stick determine the quality of sound produced. A very light, small-diameter stick will produce a thin sound. This is sometimes desired, but often small drum sticks are used constantly by players who are not aware of the quality of full-bodied sound that is obtained only with a heavier stick. Select a general-purpose stick that is rigid enough, especially toward the tapered shoulder and neck (see Figure 2.2) to produce a full-bodied sound. Sticks with excessive shoulder taper “give” or “flex” when played and result in a considerable loss of tone. (See discussion and demonstration of this on the DVD.)



Do not use a stick that will “overplay” an instrument. Too large or too heavy a stick will muffle or cancel out most of the vibrations from an instrument and cause a dull tone. An example would be a heavy drum stick, timpani, or marimba mallet used on a small bongo or tom tom, where a suitable stick would be a thin wooden dowel. (See demonstration on DVD.)

A stick with a small bead (Cooperman #1 Graham C. Johns and Vic Firth Bolero models) will sound best for playing fast articulate rhythmic passages, and a stick with a larger general-purpose bead will sound best for loud or soft roll passages with moderate rhythmic activity (Reamer [Drummer’s Service] Abel and Bookspan models; Cooperman Zuber, Petrella and others’ models; Vic Firth SD1 Generals). Figure 2.3 shows various sticks as recommended in Chapter 1. Note the changing bead size yet consistent gripping area in the Firth line of sticks. For excellent quality concert snare sticks see web sites for Drummer’s Service, Cooperman, Vic Firth, Innovative, Pro Mark, Mike Balter and others in the online Appendix C.

Playing Areas

Drum playing areas must also be taken into consideration for a true musical performance. In general, any well-tuned, nonmuffled drum will give a dry, slightly muffled tone in the center and more resonance toward the edge. The lowest fundamental tone is produced in the center of a drum with a thinning of the tone occurring nearer the edge. The head is slightly tighter near the edge and therefore is a slightly easier area on which to play soft delicate passages, but this practice should be pursued discreetly.

A well-tuned snare drum will give a quick dry snare response when played directly over the snares and a slightly slower snare response when played away from or opposite the snares. These tonal characteristics should be considered when choosing where on the head to perform a given passage (for instance, a roll will sound smoother when played opposite the snares, and fast rhythms are more articulate when played directly over the snares).

Generally, playing just off center will give a full tone with a slight amount of resonance. When playing soft articulate passages, one must choose between the dry articulate center-area sound and the more resonant, over-the-snares articulate edge sound. Care must be taken not to play loudly too near the edge of a head. This produces a poor,

FIGURE 2.2 Snare drum stick

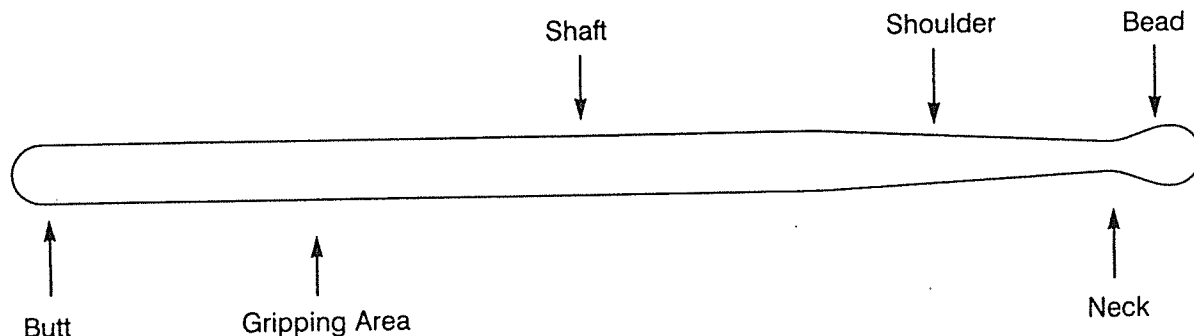
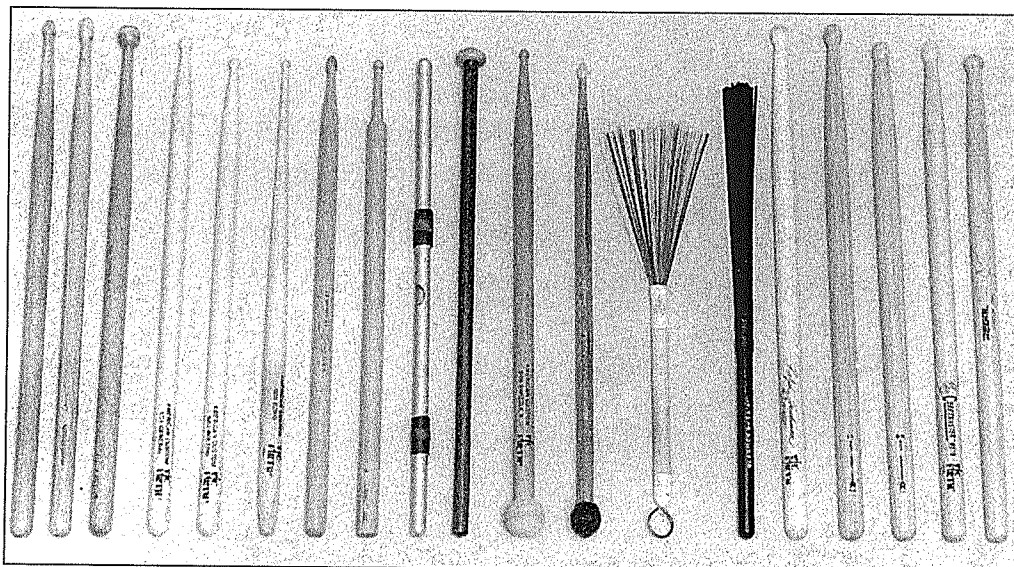


FIGURE 2.3 Sticks and brushes, left to right: two Chris Lamb orchestral models, Vick Firth-Thunder Rock, Vick Firth-SD1 Generals, Vic Firth-SD2 Bolero, Vick Firth SD5-Echo, Ludwig standard 2B, Tom Gauger #16, Hinger aluminum, RAMROD sticks by RAM Percussion, Vick Firth-SD6 Sizzle, nylon tip home-made yarn double-ended stick, Ludwig wire brushes, Blastik by Calato, Vick Firth Corpsmaster Ralph Hardiman signature model, Silverfox-3S, Silverfox-M/S, Vic Firth MS1N nylon tip model, Regal Tip Quantum



thin tone that is never acceptable to the tone-conscious ear. Also, overuse of edge-to-center playing for soft to loud passages will give too much of the effect of different instruments and too much color change. Dynamic contrast must be created by fine control and technique.

■ TOM TOM, FIELD DRUM, TENOR DRUM, AND ROTO-TOMS

In addition to the snare drum, the percussionist will often be called upon to play other concert drums. Tom toms are available in many different sizes (see Figure 2.4). The choice of instrument should be based on its use in the context of the music. A quick substitute for a tom tom is a snare drum with "snare off." This is also what is usually intended when a composer writes for snare drum "muffled."

Generally, if field drum (*tamburo militare* [It.], *militär trommel* [Ger.], *tambour militaire* [Fr.]) is called for, a large marching-style snare drum (approx. 12" × 15") is used with snares (Figure 2.5). In a concert hall this type of drum should have gut or cable snares and should not be tuned as high as our modern marching snares (see Chapter 9). It should be played with larger sticks than ordinarily used on a standard concert snare drum.

A tenor drum (*tamburo* or *cassa rullante* [It.], *ruhrtrommel* or *wirbel trommel* [Ger.], *caisse roulante* or *tambourin roulant* [Fr.]) would be considered a field drum without snares (Figure 2.5). A large, deep-sounding drum (approximately 12" × 15"–16") often is preferred. Although the tenor drum is usually played with large snare drum sticks, occasionally a pair of yarn or felt mallets is better. Again, careful consideration of the musical context—along with a careful translation of the foreign term for these instruments—is required of the percussionist when choosing the tenor drum or the field drum.

Another non-snare drum category is roto-toms. These unique drums evolved from the early demands for tuned chromatic drums in the percussion writing of Michael

Further thoughts on practice and learning are presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 9. The reader is encouraged to view these all collectively in formulating concepts of practice and education.

■ MATCHED AND TRADITIONAL GRIP

Two common grips are used in snare drum playing: matched and traditional. As noted earlier in this chapter, traditional grip came into use because it was the most convenient and logical left-hand grip for accommodating the sharp angle of the drum suspended at the drummer's side. Pictorial accounts of playing clearly illustrate the drum hanging at the musician's side; hence, it is sometimes called the "side drum." When the drum was played with the left hand, the stick was held somehow between the thumb and index finger to accommodate the angle of the drum. Sometimes only the index finger was placed on top of the stick, but usually two fingers were used as in Rembrandt's *Night Watch* of 1642.⁸

Other predecessors of the traditional grip can be seen in examples of grips used to accommodate drum angles in ancient cultures such as the Romans and the Egyptians. The use of traditional grip in the military, of course, carried over into concert hall playing, for that was how all snare drummers learned to hold their sticks. Stands were eventually built that were adjustable so as to accommodate the player's traditional grip. One of the earliest concert snare drum stands was a child's high chair with the drum inserted at the proper angle for playing. The first drum set snare drum stands in New Orleans were common chairs (which led to double-drumming with the bass drum); otherwise, the drums were suspended by a shoulder strap. Of course, while snare drummers were using traditional grip, timpanists and keyboard players were using a matched grip, so as percussionists began to play more than just the snare drum, they had to learn to play with both grips.

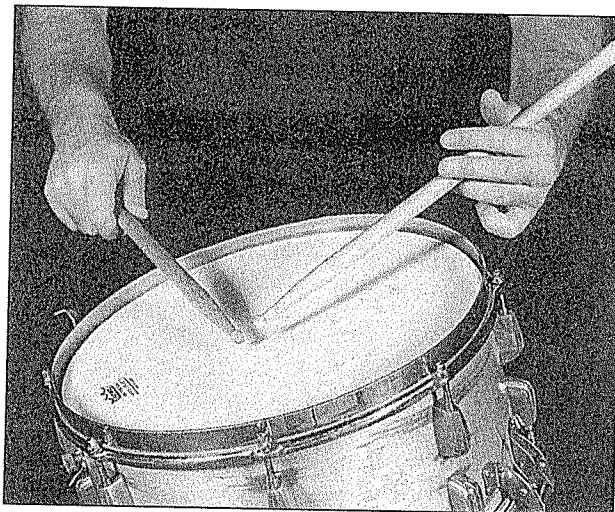
In the past three decades matched grip has become increasingly popular for snare drum playing as well as for all the other percussion instruments. This is due perhaps partially to the visual influences of matched-grip rock drummers and other percussionists seen on television and in movies, books, and magazines and matched grip being advocated more commonly in percussion pedagogy. Most important is the simple fact that as the demands on the school percussionist focused more toward proficiency on all percussion instruments, matched grip was found to be the most consistent approach to total percussion education and performance.

Many arguments have been made for using matched grip. Since nine arm muscles are used to make a matched-grip stroke (four extensor muscles move the stick down

FIGURE 2.7 Matched grip



FIGURE 2.8 Traditional grip



and five flexor muscles move it up) and only four are used for a traditional-grip stroke (two pronator muscles move the stick down and two supinator muscles move it up), then to have balanced strokes (sounds) between hands, logic suggests that matched grip be used. Further arguments for matched grip would include its greater ease in learning because it is a more natural grip. The strongest point, as previously stated, is that it is a consistent grip and can be easily transferred to all percussion instruments.

Marching snare drum performance with matched grip is easily accomplished by using a carrier to position the drum flat (see Chapter 9). Ironically, marching snares are commonly played flat with traditional grip but more recently are being played at an angle with traditional grip. Some professionals would advocate playing snare drum in the concert hall at an angle with traditional grip for projection of tone.

While traditional grip is preferred by some (often in combination with matched) on drum set, marching snare, and in the concert hall, matched grip is recommended for training the percussionist and has served as a consistent approach to percussion education and performance for many successful percussionists. (Additional comments on traditional grip are included in Chapters 8 and 9.)

■ INSTRUMENT HEIGHT AND STANCE

A word should be said about instrument height and proximity to the player. The role of body poise and postural use is paramount in realizing optimum learning and performance potentials. A good general concept concerning instrument height would be to have the forearms almost parallel to the floor when playing any percussion instrument. A slight reaching downward would not be harmful, but avoid an extreme reaching downward. Players taller than about 5'8" often have the latter difficulty with snare drum stands that do not adjust to standing playing position because they are intended to be used with the player seated at a drum set. (See the discussion of this on the DVD.) All instruments should be at approximately waist or hip-bone level even if some form of instrument riser is needed. Players taller than 5'8" may especially want to elevate their keyboard percussion instruments by placing four small 2" × 4" or 4" × 4" wooden blocks under the wheels or, better, investing in an adjustable height instrument. If blocks are used, each block should have a rubber or plastic furniture stop attached to its top to keep the wheel from rolling off the block (four thick telephone books have been used to raise instruments, too). Blocking the instrument to a correct playing level will result in more comfortable and more natural playing than having to stoop or bend at the knees excessively. For the tall player, sitting on a stool for timpani performance balances the body better, positions the arms more parallel to the drum head, and avoids stooping.

The antithesis of being too tall for an instrument is often the lot of a young percussionist playing full-size instruments. When addressing keyboards or even timpani, a sturdy box or a couple of crates for a short player to stand on helps him or her reach the instrument.

The distance between the instrument and the player is easily determined by placing the sticks or mallets on the instrument's playing area and checking where the player's elbows fall in relation to the side of his or her body. This "rule of elbow" is that the elbows should be slightly forward from or even with the sides of the body when performing on any stationary percussion instrument. This allows for maximum relaxation from the shoulders down to the fingers and ease in arm/hand movement over the instrument. (See the demonstration of this rule of elbow on the DVD.)

If one stands too close to the instrument, a relaxed technical development is hindered, and tone is also slightly constricted by a subtle involuntary squeezing in the hands caused by the elbows being forced behind the sides of the body. A poised position at any stationary percussion instrument will result in a straight back with one's head balanced on one's neck and elbows relaxed at one's sides. Although a slight bending toward the instrument with combined movement from ankle, knee, and hip joints may, in performance especially, make the difference between a musically inspired and engag-

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ing performance for the audience, the percussionist must be aware of his or her poise at the instruments and not slump and stoop over them. The percussionist has a psychological barrier or resistance to overcome because of the lack of physical contact with the instrument. The player must become "one" with the instrument and mallets if he or she is to achieve musical expression, and correct instrument/player arrangement is crucial if this is to occur.

■ A CONCEPT OF THE GRIP AND STROKE

The basic matched grip will be discussed using snare drum sticks because of the easy availability of sticks and practice pads. However, there is very little difference in the matched grip whether used with snare sticks, keyboard percussion mallets, or timpani mallets. If these other instruments and mallets are available, they may also be used for the initial practice. The idiosyncrasies of their grips are discussed in their respective chapters.

Please view the following grip and stroke discussions and demonstrations on the accompanying DVD. The most important point to remember when teaching, learning, or playing percussion with any grip is to allow yourself to be *relaxed*. At no time before or during a stroke should one experience tension in any part of the body, especially in the hands, wrists, arms, and shoulders; a little fatigue, perhaps, but not tension.

To experientially learn about relaxation and tension in these extremities, we can do the lady bug exercise. Please follow along on the DVD. Simply hold your arms out in front of you, palms facing the floor. Wiggle your hands loosely as if bouncing tennis balls or waving goodbye from the wrists. Notice the looseness in the hands, wrists, and arms. Now press the thumb slightly against your index and middle fingers as if lightly holding a stick (or gently holding a lady bug), and notice what it feels like as you continue waving—but don't hurt your lady bug! Increase the thumb pressure (and squish your poor lady bug), even close your fingers tightly into the palm, and notice the restricted movement in the wrists and arms. Now let go of the thumb and fingers and wave the hands loosely again. This experience illustrates that the more loosely one can hold the sticks, with a whole-handed supportive type of grip, the more relaxed and easy playing will be. If tension is detected at any time while playing—and you are squishing your lady bug—stop, take a deep breath, "shake it loose," and resume practice.

In general, a good concept of the basic percussion stroke played with any grip on any drum would consist of the performer *tossing* or *pushing* the stick toward the head, from a raised position above the drum with a hearty but resilient stroke, made with a balanced combination of fingers, wrist, and arm, and immediately allowing the stick to rebound naturally back to its starting position. This cyclic stick movement is called a *full stroke* and can occur at any height depending on speed and volume. The natural rebound should not be inhibited by the performer in any way. There should be no downward resistance to the energy of the stick rebounding or any artificial pulling of the stick up off the head. (In keyboard performance, the concept is the same but lacking much natural rebound off the bars; therefore a certain amount of artificial rebound lifting must be created. See DVD stroke demonstration on keyboard compared to snare drum in Chapter 4.) An acute sensitivity to this natural rebound will result in the hand actually *following* the stick back to its starting position. This sensitivity is developed only with a loose but supportive grip that cushions the stick, flexible wrists, and coordinated arm connection.

A good way to conceive of this sensitivity in the stroke is simply to imagine bouncing a tennis ball off the drum head, with a gentle throw or push of the ball toward the head being initiated primarily from the wrists. You might even try lightly bouncing real balls off a hard floor or table and then off the drum head. This idea of allowing the ball to freely rebound off the drum when actively playing, coupled with an "in-tune" synchronization of the fingers, hand, wrist, and arm to the stick's natural rebound off the drum, forms a desirable concept for tone production and touch on all percussion instruments with any grip.

DVD

