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## FOREWORD

What could be more challenging to a percussionist than extracting the greatest amount of music out of an instrument that supplies the least amount of possibilities? This challenge is presented to every concert snare drummer. The snare drum lacks most of the characteristics musicians look for when attempting to play musically. Basically, it has one sound and is very *staccato*—both undesirable elements when performing in a musical manner.

After considering these limitations, let's look at what is available to the performer:

1. Rhythm
2. Dynamics
3. Tempo
4. Phrasing
5. Interpretation

Although these musical elements are available to every instrumentalist, many of them are sacrificed for its single, most obvious element—rhythm. Musicians, however, can improve their performance by properly utilizing these elements as outlined below:

**RHYTHM:** I have a sign in my studio that reads: PRECISION, SENSITIVITY, MUSICALITY—three essential qualities for making music. Notice the first quality precision—this refers to rhythm. Without precise rhythm, the remaining qualities will not be effective. What good is a beautiful sound, even when played with sensitivity and musicality, if it is in the wrong place? I think we can all agree that our primary concern should be to place the notes in their correct position in the music.

Once we have properly placed the rhythms, our next concern should be focused on their accuracy. Rhythms should not be rushed, dragged, or interpreted in such a way as to be inconsistent with musical style or other performers.

Rhythm is very important and deserves our primary attention. When this element of music has been taken care of, then we can focus on other, equally important, areas of performance.

**DYNAMICS:** Dynamics add a great deal to music. They allow the more important solo lines to project while the accompaniment is heard at a softer level. They also add to the character of the music by creating many levels of sound within the work.

Performers are constantly involved with interpreting dynamics because they are not always played at the same level. Many factors enter into a decision on how loud a *forte* marking should be played; for example: (1). The size of the ensemble; (2). The size of the hall; (3). Whether a performance is indoors or outdoors; (4). Whether the stage has a shell or not; (5). The quality of the instruments being used; (6). Balancing the dynamic level with other performers; and, (7). Being flexible to the conductor's indications.

One simple decision a performer must make is deciding whether the dynamic marking is for an accompaniment or a solo part. If the entire orchestra has a *forte* marking, and the trumpet is the solo line, it is important for the other musicians to play slightly under the trumpet so the solo line projects.

One of the first lessons we learn as musicians is that dynamics are only relative. An obvious mistake by inexperienced musicians, when they are asked by the conductor to play louder or softer, is to utter the response, "But, my part says *forte* (or *piano*).” The conductor knows what the part says, he or she is just trying to adjust the balance.

**TEMPO:** Tempo is closely aligned to rhythm; however, it takes on another very important area of musicianship – the ability to follow the conductor. A performer may be playing accurately and with the correct dynamic, but if the conductor's tempo indications cannot be followed, a major problem will exist.

During the course of a performance, the conductor may make tempo changes (whether they have been rehearsed or not). It is the performer's responsibility to maintain eye contact with the conductor and to be flexible enough to adjust the tempo at any given time.

A musician may be a very gifted soloist and have tremendous command of the instrument, but if the player cannot follow the conductor, his or her value in the orchestra is limited.

Tempo is critical with regard to solo playing because it cannot vary haphazardly within the work. There is an enormous difference in adjusting tempo for musical reasons and just plain rushing or dragging.

**PHRASING:** Since much of the music written for percussion instruments is not phrased, the musical element of phrasing is a major consideration for percussionists. Phrasing is the composer's responsibility, but for many reasons, some composers do not feel the necessity of adding phrase markings to the percussion parts.

Whether these markings are present or not, music played by percussion instruments must be phrased in the same manner as any instrumentalist. When a percussion part does not have indicated markings, the performer must listen carefully to other instrumentalists to determine the proper phrasing.

Another concern is the ability to interpret phrase markings. Since the musical elements for snare drum are limited, the only method we have for phrasing is the use of accents, *staccato* marks, and dynamics. Although other instrumentalists phrase with longer or shorter sounds, this is not available to a snare drummer.

Two types of accents are available for phrasing. The first is the written accent which is played noticeably louder than an unaccented note. The second is the phrase accent, which is a subtler accent and should not be as loud as the written accent.

If a series of four sixteenth notes were written for snare drum and we wanted to phrase each group of four notes, a phrase accent or *staccato* mark should be placed on each of the first four notes. The remaining three notes would then be played softer than the first for the phrasing to be effective.



When performing music in mixed meters (for example, 3/8, 2/8, 3/8), the first note of each measure should have a phrase accent so meter changes can be felt. Since there is no standard marking for a phrase accent, I am using the *staccato* mark.



**INTERPETATION:** The final element is interpretation. This is the most difficult element to teach since a person's interpretation is basically his or her own opinion. As long as the elements of music are not compromised, an individual's own interpretation is valid for solo works.

A very important consideration in interpreting orchestral music is that it is the conductor's responsibility to instruct the performers on how to interpret the music. Performers must be flexible enough to interpret the music according to the conductor wishes.

It is also necessary for a soloist to create an interpretation of the music by analyzing its form and deciding what the composer originally intended. Then, using the elements previously discussed, construct a masterful performance.

## ETUDE #1

After considering the information presented in the Foreword, I would now like to discuss the practical application of those music elements to a given composition. I have developed the following observations and interpretations throughout my years of performing and teaching; however, they do not preclude other interpretations. One of the greatest aspects of music is that no two performances are ever exactly alike. Listening to different recordings of classical symphonies by different conductors makes this evident. One factor, however, that should remain constant is the markings indicated by the composer in the score. The opening of Etude #1, for example, should begin with a loud dynamic and immediately *decrecendo* within two measures—how loud the performer begins and how much *decrecendo* is made is not always constant.

Another variable is tempo. Even though there are metronome markings for each Etude, every performer finds a comfortable tempo that may be faster or slower than indicated. Precision, sensitivity, and musicality, however, should not be sacrificed for speed.

Thematic material becomes obvious as these Etudes are studied. As I composed these pieces, I tried to write musically for the snare drum and included the same musical characteristics found in sonatas for violin, flute, etc. The idea of using rhythmic themes, therefore, became an important aspect when composing these etudes. The performer should be aware of thematic material and allow the themes to project.

### OBSERVATIONS:

1. The opening measures present the rhythmic theme, which repeats in the second measure of line 6 and, again, in the last line. It should be heard as the beginning of a section each time this theme returns; therefore, the *ff* marking must be the loudest dynamic. The preceding accents should not be as loud as the statement of the theme.
2. The second measure of line 3 begins a series of three, two-measure phrases. Each two measures should be at a different dynamic level without a *decrecendo*.
3. All written accents should be noticeably louder than non-accented notes. The accents preceding each theme should also have a driving effect as they lead into the theme.
4. Use the center of the snare drum head for all loud playing and the edge of the head for all soft playing. When playing near the edge, the sticks should be over the snare bed.

### INTERPRETATIONS:

1. The opening *decrecendo* should go from a *fortissimo* level to a *piano* level and then return to the *mezzo forte* at the third measure, increasing the effectiveness of the *decrecendo*.
2. The following *crescendo* into line 2 could be louder than a *fortissimo*; if it is, the *subito pp* will be more exciting. Remember, move quickly to the edge of the head for the *subito pp*.
3. The *pianissimo* in line 2 should not be softer than the triple *piano* in line 4.
4. There is no indication in line 8 explaining how soft to make the *diminuendo*. My interpretation is that it should decrease in sound until it can no longer be heard.
5. The series of loud and soft dynamics in line 10 should all be played in the center of the head. When a player moves too quickly between the center and edge of the head, the sound's quality changes very rapidly and the result is in poor taste.