

MASSACHUSETTS PERCUSSION NEWS

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Percussive Arts Society Mission Statement:

*The Percussive Arts Society is
a music service organization
promoting percussion educa-
tion, research, performance,
and appreciation throughout
the world.*

A CONVERSATION WITH ALAN ABEL

Alan Abel was a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1959 to 1998 and is known around the world as one of the finest orchestral teachers of percussion. By way of example, at a recent Chicago Symphony audition (won by an Abel student), six of the fifteen semifinalists were graduates of Temple University having studied with Mr. Abel. Not simply content to teach and perform, Mr. Abel has also been an innovator in the world of orchestral percussion with several important inventions to his credit, including the Abel Triangle, and the suspended bass drum stand. Mr. Abel's students are performing in many of the major orchestras world-wide including those in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, the Metropolitan Opera, Atlanta, Minnesota, Houston, Pittsburg and San Francisco.



MPN: Could you describe your PAS duties?

AA: I'm the chair of the symphonic committee which was formed in 2001. There wasn't much representation of the orchestral area at the 2000 Dallas PASIC. We went from four events to sixteen hours in 2001. At the PAS executive committee's request I formed a committee made up of percussionists from major orchestras as well as regional ones. In addition, we invited two freelancers from big cities and a college professor (former orchestra player) to the committee as well. We tried to get a wide age range and also represent different areas of the orchestral field. There are often scheduling issues with orchestral musicians because they are at the mercy of the repertoire that their orchestra plays in terms of availability for clinics at PASIC. This committee follows up to search out replacements if someone cannot participate. The Symphonic Emeritus section got started the first year as well and will be going for its third year now. Some of the clinicians

for this year are: Tim Genis on timpani; David Herbert and Trey Wyatt will perform, explain and discuss a brand new piece that Bill Kraft is writing right now; Ted Adkatz will present a clinic/performance on snare drum and accessories; and Michael Udow will devote his presentation exclusively to opera which I don't think has ever been done before. We will also have a panel discussion and a percussion mock audition. Labs will feature Brian Kushmaul on the drumset in the orchestra; Dave Fishlock on the tambourine; Tony Cirone on the suspended cymbal; Eric Millstein will examine the glockenspiel; Brian Del Signore will explain small percussion accessories; Nicholas Ormrod will do a presentation on classical period percussion; and a timpani head clearing lab will be given by Mark Yancich. The Emeritus section is: Rabio, Lang, Cirone, Beck, Jerry Unger and myself. (continued, pg 6)

VISIT US ON THE WEB

Our Massachusetts Chapter of PAS has its own web site.
<http://www.pas.org/chapters/massachusetts>

VIEW THIS NEWS-LETTER ONLINE

Massachusetts Percussion News is now available online in PDF format. You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader in order to view the publication from our web site. All past issues are available.

AREAS OF INTEREST

This newsletter needs your input on such subjects as:

- world percussion
- drum circles
- timpani
- mallet keyboards
- marching percussion
- performing
- practicing
- interviews with pros
- helpful repertoire
- listening recommendations

If you have more ideas please contact us via the chapter web site address printed below.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Reach the Editor at scottsnow123@aol.com

SPOTLIGHT ON MARCHING PERCUSSION: NEIL LARRIVEE

Neil Larrivee is currently the Pit Director and Arranger for the eight time DCI World Champion Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps. He has been with the Cadets since 1993. In 2001, 2002 & 2003, The Cadets were awarded the DCI Division 1 High Percussion Trophy. Neil served as Co-Marching Band Director, Percussion Director & Arranger at King Philip Regional High School of Wrentham, MA from 1985 - 2002. He was the Director and designer for the 2000 WGI Scholastic World Champion King Philip Indoor Marching Percussion Ensemble. King Philip placed second as well in '97, '98 & 2001. The King Philip Concert Percussion Ensemble also placed second during 2001 in the Scholastic Concert World Class. During his time at King Philip, the Marching Band attained 15 Massachusetts State Marching Band Gold Medals, 8 New England Scholastic Band Association Championships, 10 New England Championship High Percussion Awards, 4 United States Scholastic Band Association Championships, 6 USSBA Championship High Percussion Awards, 2 Bands of America Northeast Regional Championships, 2 BOA Grand National Semi-Finalist placements and the 2000 Grand National AA Bronze medal. Neil served on the WGI Percussion Advisory Board & Steering Committee from 1997 - 2002 and presently serves as Education Chairperson for the Percussion Marketing Council. He has served as a judge for WGI, NESBA & USSBA and endorses Remo, Zildjian and Pearl/Adams. Additionally Neil is the Director of Education and New Product Development for Vic Firth Inc. and has works for percussion published by Row-Loff Productions.

MPN: How has arranging for front ensemble changed in the last few years?

NL: The biggest change I see throughout the activity has been in the coordination of the entire design team so that the pit gets more opportunity to contribute its voice within the music program. This is within the brass/wind score and also as a solo voice.

MPN: What are ways that front ensemble instruments and playing implements have improved in the past few years?



NL: The quality of the instruments has gone through the roof. Manufacturers have put a great deal of focus into development and quality control. It's very difficult now to buy a bad instrument. That's a neat thing to say about the industry as a whole. Manufacturers like Pearl/Adams and Yamaha are doing some outstanding work and others like Premier and Musser are making great-sounding instruments as well. In terms of the development of implements, this too has been an area where there has been great development. The implement manufacturers have paid a lot of attention in trying to develop mallets that assist with projection and create a darker and richer sound with a deeper fundamental so the quality of sound is more fulfilling. It's less about brilliance and trying to cut through. I think we talk about cutting through the ensemble a lot less now than a few years ago. Some of that goes back to your question on how arranging for the pit has changed in the last ten years. The total design team (brass/winds/percussion) works together so there is more availability for the pit voice to get through. The quality of the instruments and approach to arranging allows us to get away from trying to cut through with hard projecting mallets and instead create wonderful sounds. (cont. page 7)

A VISIT TO THE NOBLE AND COOLEY DRUM COMPANY

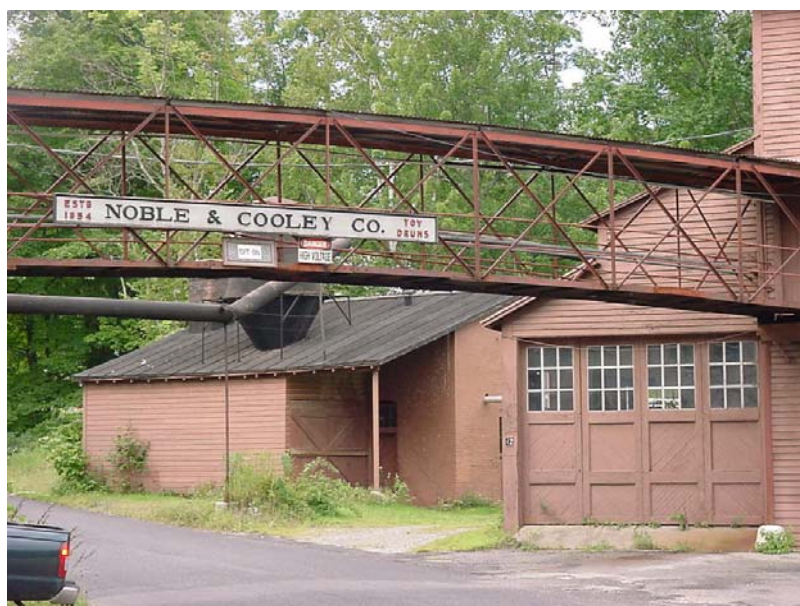
As a company, Noble & Cooley has a rich heritage that is as singular and remarkable as the drums themselves. Founded in 1854 by Silas Noble and James Cooley, the company has been producing drums for over 140 years. We were one of the primary manufacturers of marching drums for the Union Army during the Civil War. Still owned and operated by direct descendants of James Cooley, the Noble & Cooley Company of today is run from the same rustic location in Granville, Massachusetts. For many years, Noble & Cooley served primarily the toy drum market. It was in 1980 that company vice-president Jay Jones (Great-great-grandson of James Cooley) decided to enter the professional drum arena. Working closely with designer Bob Gatzert and pulling out of retirement a steam bending machine old enough to have survived a company fire in 1889, N&C introduced the Solid Shell Maple Classic snare drum in late 1983. The drum was a huge success and revolutionized the drum industry to a degree no one could have expected. It is precisely this combination of innovation and tradition that fuels Noble & Cooley to this day. Attention to detail

and the relentless pursuit of perfection are the motivating ideals of our company philosophy. Our commitment to excellence is the reason why Noble & Cooley are called by many "The World's Best Drums."

MPN sat down with Noble and Cooley Drum Company's President, Jay Jones.

MPN: Noble & Cooley Drum Company comes from a very rich heritage. Would you talk about how the company was founded and is it true that your company was a primary drum manufacturer for the Union Army during the Civil War?

JJ: Mr. Noble made toy drums in his kitchen in 1853 for friends and family. He thought he had a good idea and went to Mr. Cooley for financing and they incorporated in 1854. The company grew rapidly. They did make drums for the Union Army during the Civil War but I don't know if they were the major or primary manufacturer. The toy drum production was always there. In fact, we have manufactured toy drums every year since 1854. (continued, pg. 11)



The Noble and Cooley Drum Company is located in Granville, MA.

ARTICLES WANTED!

Much of the material in this issue was submitted by our members. If you have something you'd like to see published in Massachusetts Percussion News, you are encouraged to submit it to our editorial staff for consideration.

MASSACHUSETTS PERCUSSION NEWS ARTICLE DEADLINES

Submissions for publication in Massachusetts Percussion News must be in the hands of the editorial staff no later than one month before publication.

DEADLINE PUBLICATION

August 1 September 1

December 1 January 1

April 1 May 1

Submissions via email are preferred. Please send articles and event information to scottsnow123@charter.net and attach images / files individually. Hard copies can be sent to Scott Snow, PO Box 269, Charlton, MA 01507.

ANY SUGGESTIONS?

The intent of this newsletter is to bring together people in Massachusetts that teach and or perform percussion. Email the editor with ideas so we can continue to develop this newsletter.

IN THROUGH THE OUT DOOR: JOHN BONHAM ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

By Dave Fox

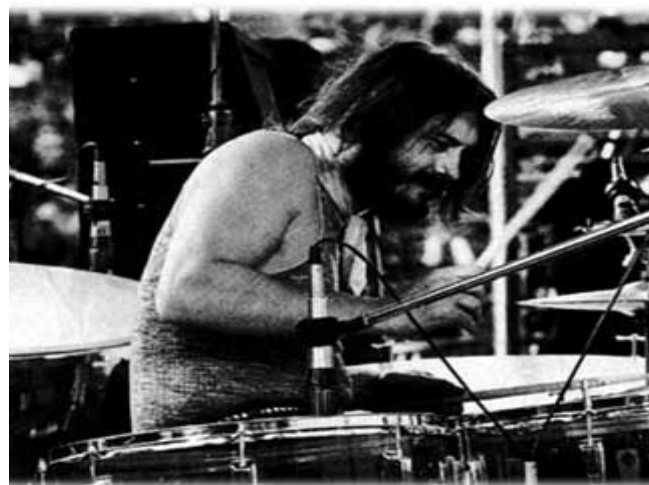
With the recent release of the new Led Zeppelin DVD set (containing over 5 hours of unreleased concert performances from Led Zeppelin's heyday in the 70's), John Bonham fans can once again bask in the glory of their beloved drum hero while a whole new generation of drummers can see for the first time what made Bonham so influential. For many contemporary drumset artists, Bonham played an enormous role inspiring one to pick up the instrument. While extremely influential in the developmental stages, over time a student's further education results in finding new influences. At this point, one can easily succumb to the thought of Bonham only being a rock drummer "Neanderthal" brutally slugging away at his kit and whose antics resemble something straight out of Spinal Tap. I was one of the many that had fallen into this trap (call it musical snobbery if you will) until one rainy Sunday afternoon when I put in Disc One of the new Led Zeppelin DVD and was reminded once again of what really made Bonham so great and how he has influenced me.

During its twelve year existence (1968-1980), Led Zeppelin was an international phenomenon that, at the time, enjoyed a popularity topped only by The Beatles. Being at the forefront of this frenzy, John Bonham's persona was larger than life and inspired thousands of aspiring musicians to pick up drumsticks. In live performance, his infamous solo spot on "Moby Dick" could reach up to 40 minutes in length bringing the standard "stadium rock drum solo" to dizzying new heights. Not since the days of Gene Krupa had we seen the drums brought to the forefront of a vastly popular music with such musicality and showmanship. John Bonham not only pushed the boundaries of heavy progressive rock and roll drumming, but also introduced percussion instruments not commonly found in rock music. This gave Led Zeppelin (not to mention the genre itself) a sense of depth and character that has rarely been duplicated. With the use of hand drums, timpani, gongs, mallets, brushes and even his bare hands, Bonham was able to produce truly unique percussive colors (albeit while not sacrificing any of his sound) that ranged from primitive carnal ostinatos, to splashes of ethereal shading, to full on bombastic onslaught!

All of this became apparent as Disc One of the Led Zeppelin DVD began. Without warning (and thankfully without any of the annoying DVD menu screens which are all too common these days) we are instantly transported back to 1970 for one of Zeppelin's seminal performances at London's Royal Albert Hall. As the band rips into a raucous version of Ben E. King's "Were Gonna Groove," I was overcome with sheer giddiness that was very similar to the feeling I had when I was thirteen and heard Led Zeppelin IV for the first time. I knew I had stumbled upon something very unique: this was not going to be a routine exercise in dexterity, or anything you could try to pass off as background music. Rather, this was something that shook you at the core and rattled your soul. It was an initiation into that private club whose only prerequisite is "cool" and you were now one of its members! For many, it was during moments like these, that

we decided (whether conscious or not), that being a musician was something we had to do. As the Royal Albert Hall performance catapulted through scorching renditions of Zeppelin staples such as "I Can't Quit You Baby," "Dazed and Confused," "Whole Lotta Love" and "Bring it On Home", I felt as if this was a band I was seeing for the very first time. Keep in mind this is music I thought I had known intimately for fifteen years, yet, it became clear what made this group more prolific than any other rock group in the past thirty years. They were the perfect cocktail of mystique, showmanship, and musicality, which produced a vast catalog of classics yet to be duplicated. While it has never been a secret these classics are deeply rooted in African-American Blues artists such as Willie Dixon, John Lee Hooker, Harpo Slim, and Muddy Waters, for the first time I understood just how innovative Zeppelin were. In short, they maintained a consistent level of integrity and respect towards their blues roots but also pushed the boundaries of the writing, performing, and recording of 60's popular rock music. I was born during the height of Zeppelin's popularity and they were the standard that all great rock music (heavy and otherwise) was based. I grew up in an age where "Stairway to Heaven" was the song you saved for your most important slow dance at the end of the high school dance and the older kids wore leather jackets covered with Zeppelin patches. It was as big a part of the American youth experience as McDonald's and it was hard to picture life without them. It took me years of going back and checking out the great American blues and jazz artists of the twentieth century to realize there was relevant music before Led Zeppelin. In doing so, teenage drumming idols such as Bonham, Neil Peart, and Stewart Copeland fell to the wayside while Max Roach, Tony Williams and Elvin Jones became the standard of excellence to which I aspired. To me, the two worlds seemed completely unrelated and by not letting go of one (in this case rock music) you couldn't advance toward a complete understanding of the other.

Wallowing in nostalgia watching this Royal Albert Hall footage, I was caught completely unaware as Robert Plant (vocals)



announced "...John Henry Bonham...Moby Dick". The infamous syncopated snare fill that opens the piece startled me with the realization of how important this had been to me at one time. With an exuberated confidence, a young and hungry John Bonham, Jimmy Page (guitar), and John Paul Jones (bass) chugged their way through the swampy blues progression. I was immediately overwhelmed and as the final phrase of the progression ended I braced myself for what is truly one of the most recognizable drum solos in rock history. Instead of the usual opening tribal cadence in 4/4 time that begins the solo, Bonham launched into 3/4 time and proceeded to play the melody of Max Roach's "The Drum Also Waltzes"- Jazz drumming master Max Roach's signature solo piece! My jaw hit the floor and was struck with the epiphany that I did in fact have something in common with the hard hitting, hard living drum god. Like me, John Bonham also spent time researching drummers like Max Roach and Elvin Jones. Maybe to him, those guys were larger than life on stage and off (and in so many ways they truly are).

Without giving much away, the rest of the Led Zeppelin DVD set contains amazing footage and the sound quality is outstanding. It is, however, bittersweet to finally see such an exposed documentation of over ten years of live performances. As ingeniously as Zeppelin performed onstage, the notorious offstage shenanigans of a young touring rock band seemed to take their toll over time. Zeppelin made no bones about their abuses of alcohol, drugs, women and money. This behavior was keeping true to their blues and jazz roots and kept them just outside the mainstream of what was considered acceptable by parents and authority figures. In particular, John Bonham's substance abuse, practical jokes and hell raising resembled sheer lunacy. Throughout the concerts contained in the DVD set (Royal Albert '70, Madison Square Garden '73, Earl's Court '75, and Knebworth '79), one can view the evolution of a fit, hungry twenty-one year old at the Royal Albert Hall to a relaxed and reflective Bonham at Knebworth shot less than a year before his accidental death in 1980. Sadly, the physical effect such an outlandish lifestyle had on him is quite evident with each passing concert.

Bonham's playing is brilliant throughout the DVD set. It's all here: his signature deep pocket, "larger than life" sound, lightning fast single bass drum chops and the linear snare/tom/ bass drum patterns that have become a staple of heavy rock drumming. The footage is eye opening because there are many close ups showing the evolution of Bonham's technique and sound. Arm swinging bashing in 1970 evolves into more relaxed wrist strokes by 1979. In fact, he plays with a lighter touch than many people realize. I think it's evident that his sound and groove became even more powerful with the confidence and relaxation he exudes in later years. "Kashmir" from the Knebworth concert is a great example of how to negotiate space and "sit" on a groove. Bonham is at his best augmenting his signature, solid, pocket with extended syncopated phrases that drive the group to frenzy by song's end!

More evidence of Bonham's talent is displayed on some great clips of him singing harmony on tracks such as "Bron Yr Aur Stomp" and "The Ocean." Disc One contains a very rare clip of Bonham speaking with a reporter about the tex-

tural differences and song selection of Led Zeppelin III. Bonham is very polite, articulate, and personable- something you wouldn't expect from such a notorious hell raiser!

The lesson to be learned from these outstanding DVDs is that John Bonham was an original. He was a true innovator in that he built upon the foundation of his education yet moved forward by realizing that music does not have to be a certain way all of the time. Although Max Roach may not have fit Led Zeppelin and John Bonham may have been too much for Sonny Rollins (although the thought of either situation is tantalizing) it doesn't mean they are unrelated entities. John Bonham is as much related to Max Roach and Elvin Jones as he is to Keith Moon and Ginger Baker. The goal now should be obvious: take what you've gotten from someone like John Bonham and keep searching further back for the same qualities. You may find you'll cross many genres and cultures if you look long and hard enough. The one thing that will remain consistent is that all will be great not because of dexterity, image or fame. All will be great because they speak to you from the heart with a sense of humility, honesty, and integrity. Take that quality and spread the word by moving forward.

Dave Fox is a drum set artist and educator currently residing in the Boston area. He has studied with the likes of Walter Tockarczyk, Thom Hannum, and Bob Gullotti and is also a staff member of Thom Hannum's Mobile Percussion Seminar. Since 2000 he has performed with Butterstuff Records Recording Artists Dr. Awkward. With Dr. Awkward, he has performed all over the Northeast and released two albums "Very" and "Safari Sessions" on the Butterstuff label.



MPN: This is your last year?

AA: Yes, we set up the committee so that a member serves a three year term with a maximum of two terms. The committee chair is limited to one three year term.

MPN: Can you talk about your tenure with the Philadelphia Orchestra?

AA: I was in the orchestra for 38 years plus five years as a substitute or extra player.

MPN: How do you keep your performances fresh?

AA: Well, in the course of a concert series where we play the same repertoire for a week, the focus is on consistency. The danger in these situations is to let your guard down which is when mistakes can occur. Also playing in different halls can change your interpretations. Hearing about what other orchestras might do can affect the interpretations too. The programming context of a piece might change the way I'd play where something might need to be more or less flamboyant for example. I feel that I've always tried to be the perpetual student where I try to grow as a musician. Of course, the conductor can change the way you play as well. They usually want a lot of choices. I can remember doing the Shostakovich 2nd Violin Concerto where there is a tom-tom part. The first thing you want to do here is to be as close as possible to the soloist for ease of ensemble. Next, the conductor was interested in selecting from a variety of drums and sticks that I brought out.

MPN: What do you think of the audition process for major orchestras today?

AA: Sometimes with these bigger audition lists it might be easier for a grad student to have the excerpts in their hands because they have a lot of time to practice whereas an experienced veteran may be too busy to have seventy-five excerpts ready to play perfectly at any moment. So in this case, the older player might be better for the job and would know how to play with the orchestra whereas the younger person might do better at the audition. Another problem is when the process becomes so democratic that the committee is not allowed to sit together. Other instrumentalists will be making decisions without any help as to what they should be listening for. It would be best if the conductor can be at the semifinals as well as the finals. That way you can better test the flexibility of the auditionee. I also like the idea of having a screen up for the prelims, the semis and the first half of the finals.

MPN: In general, which are your favorite orchestras?

AA: The Philadelphia Orchestra of course is number one although I've always tried to keep an open mind about the other major orchestras with seasoned players.

MPN: Can you talk about some of your influences?

AA: I got a lot of help from my high school band director when I was growing up in Indiana. Besides being a good musician, he really emphasized a strong work ethic. Bill Street made a big impact on me at Eastman. I also tried to pay attention to the principal players in the Philadelphia Orchestra no matter what instrument. Charlie Owen and Dan Hinger were terrific mentors especially when I first got into

the orchestra.

MPN: You've been very successful as a teacher with a high success rate of students winning jobs in orchestras. How do you account for your success?

AA: Well, I've been fortunate to be able to be very selective in choosing students. Also, if I have any gifts, one of them is that I have an ability to be fairly analytical. Being a part of this great orchestra has also been important in inspiring my students. I've also tried to utilize a two-pronged approach where I try to prepare the student for both the audition and the job.

MPN: In your teaching you're very systematic and detailed in your approach.

AA: At the graduate level, it's like I'm doing both ends of the spectrum. A lot of the middle (general techniques) is already taken care of so I can work more on tremendous detail on the one end and big musical concepts at the other.

MPN: How do you want yourself to be remembered?

AA: I may have retired earlier than I needed to but I wanted to retire when I thought I was still playing well. Since then, I can be more selective about what I play. Also, I feel so lucky that I can still continue to teach for awhile and have a connection with younger people which is good for my outlook on life. I'm also happy that some of the things I've found important in playing are being carried on in so many different places by former students. Lastly, it's neat to have been a part of the legacy of the special "four horsemen" section (Owen, Hinger, Bookspan and Abel) all of whom have passed on now except for me. From a philosophical view of playing and performance, it was a special time. I have three students in the section now (I played no part in their selection) and I am happy to see the traditions of the "four horsemen" being continued. 🎵

Interview by Ed Choi

Ed Choi is currently pursuing his doctorate at Rutgers University where he studies with She-e Wu and Alan Abel. He also holds a masters degree from Northwestern where he studied with Michael Burritt and a bachelor of music from the University of Toronto under Russell Hartenberger. As a performer, Ed has concertized in Korea as a soloist and with his percussion group "exit 9" from New Jersey. Ed can be emailed at ed_choi@yahoo.com

MPN: What are the primary responsibilities of the front ensemble arrangements you write for the Cadets?

NL: I think about them in a number of ways. There are times when we have impact responsibilities where we are really trying to help the entire ensemble deliver a climax. That can be done with dark sounds or brilliant. This is likely to be non-pitched percussion instruments. Then there are times that our responsibility is to deliver the melodic line. Also, there are times when we are clearly the accompaniment and we are supporting what's going on in the brass and/or batterie voice. I think of it in those three ways.

MPN: So, that would be done in the planning? For example, between measures 8-24 the pit will be a melodic contributor?

NL: Absolutely. There are several ways to do that. Some people are really into storyboards or using a graph. That is a way to do it, especially if you are new to orchestration. I don't think I consciously do that as in I plan it out. I feel like it's on the obvious side for me now. Once those moments are defined, I get more excited about the details of what to do with the given approach whether it is in a melodic, supportive, or impact role.

MPN: In a typical Cadets show, how much would you actually have to compose new material not provided on the brass charts you receive?

NL: I would say about ninety-five percent of the time. On some occasions, Don Hill, our present brass arranger, or for many years Jay Bocook, would notate a musical line that must occur in the pit. But even when that is done, it's just a sketch of a line and I can do what I want with it. There is a lot of room for me to have fun with it.

MPN: So, with that you must have some voicings and conventions that you like to use. Do you find that you have some harmonic tools and systems that you often call upon?

NL: I think so. Anyone who works in arranging or composing tends to have devices that represent what they like to hear and that is regardless of whether you are writing percussion arrangements or symphonies. There are certain styles that as you develop, you begin to fall back on in the ways that you approach things. But not like a cookie-cutter approach, because I don't think I do that. However, I do have my traits. I get a kick out of starting each year by looking at the past year's charts and I go through this experience where I look through it and ask myself how I came up with certain ideas. I found that getting in the zone and working on the arrangement is when the creativity comes into effect. I think that is part of the magic and the reason why it is fun to do it.

MPN: This is the third year in a row that the Cadets have won the DCI High Percussion Trophy. What does it mean to you to be part of that team?

NL: It means the world to me to be part of the Cadets team! I am very proud as I know all of the Cadets staff (Tom Aungst, Eric Ward, Vern Johnson, Chris Johnson, Steve Kieffer, Glen Crosby, Jamie Eckert, Mike Greer & Giff Howarth) is for the honor of being three-time DCI Percussion Champions. But what is much more significant is the journey and how much I enjoy the challenge and the interaction with the kids and staff

and what it takes to get the program to really kick. It's really frosting on the cake that we happen to be champions. I mean, we are three-time repeat percussion champions, but there were five other times that we were second place, and we were proud of those lines, too. I'm not sure that we feel tremendously different at the end of the year just because of winning. Sure, there is the natural experience of joy knowing you were selected as the winner or disappointment if you were not. And I don't want to kid you-- I want to win at anything I do. So in the past eleven years, where we have had five second-place percussion finishes and three first-places-well, I would say it's been a heck of a ride and am very proud to have been a part of it all.

MPN: How is it that the program is so consistent?

NL: Without a doubt the most important reason for that is Tom Aungst. No question about it--he is the leader of our percussion program. He sets the tone for the entire percussion program. And he has an awful lot to do with setting the tone for the entire drum corps. When I started working with the Cadets in 1993, he was "the man" and I only consider him more so eleven years later. The second reason for our long-term success is due to a consistency in approach. Having a consistent group of teachers working together has been very important. We know how to work together and we know what we expect of each other. We've had an awful lot of carry over with some absolutely fantastic teachers. In particular; Eric Ward with the battery and Jamie Eckert with the pit. We have many other guys as well but those two guys have had long-standing commitments to and with the corps. That consistency between the design team and the tech staff has been paramount in our success.

MPN: Members of the front ensemble have to listen within their section but also have listening responsibilities to the brass and percussion on the field. Could you talk about that?

NL: It's a tough job for those kids. There are certain rules that we follow. As in anything with music, there are going to be times when you will have to deal differently than what "the rules say." However, whenever possible, we try to find a person in the pit for everyone to play together with. It is usually a line that is easy to hear such as a xylophone line, timpani line, or perhaps a groove on a world percussion instrument where everyone can lock into one person. However, this doesn't always work for us because there are players on the far left or far right of the pit set-up, and sometimes they can't all hear a single person to lock up to within the pit. So, instead we may decide that everyone is going to listen to the snare line. To summarize, we find one voice in the pit that all can relate to and then that person is in charge of listening to the brass or batterie. When that doesn't work, we have to experiment to find out another listening device that will work best.

MPN: So, is it fair to say that there is some trial-and-error?

NL: Yes, there is a definitive starting concept that we begin (continued, pg 8)

with and then we deal with it from there. The ability to be flexible also helps.

MPN: I would think you would have to go through the entire show and define where those listening points will be. Is that true?

NL: Absolutely. On a typical day on tour, we would rehearse the front ensemble alone during the morning block while the rest of the corps practices marching. We work on technique and cleaning parts of our show. We will constantly remind the kids where specific listening points are so that in the afternoon when we rehearse with the batterie during sectionals we are sure to be a cohesive unit. Then the full corps is added for ensemble rehearsal and we give further reminders of what voices to listen to. There is a procedure so kids can expect things to work certain ways and it becomes second nature to them.

MPN: I would think that by defining those things within the group that regardless of the size or design of the stadium, the ensemble will stay together.

NL: Yes. With the experience of performing in different stadiums, you learn how to prepare and adapt. During the early season, we often perform in small stadiums. In fact, it may not even be a stadium. It may just be an open field where the sound just vanishes. And then sometimes, it's learning how the sound comes back to you off a front wall of an enclosed stadium. When there is a high cement wall close to where the pit is set-up, it is a different experience for the kids. Then when the brass plays backfield it creates an entirely different experience. And now DCI is having shows in domed stadiums. The regional in Indianapolis is held in the RCA Dome and the San Antonio show is at the Alamo Dome. These have become regular show sites for the DCI tour. And domes are really a different challenge than when playing outside. For each of these examples, you have to be prepared. All listening points must be clearly defined for the players. An experienced staff must know what adjustments need to be made to perform in those venues and situations.

MPN: Just as a jazz musician needs to play in different clubs and a symphonic player would need to know how to adjust his/her playing in different venues, so does the drum corps performers?

NL: Yes, but what is quite different for us is that we don't have the luxury of a sound check before the performance.

MPN: Are you ever surprised to see how audiences react?

NL: Yes. In 1996, we performed a show called "The American West," and in it we played a portion of Copland's *Hoe-down*. At that time, there was a popular commercial for the meat industry that used the same music. So, the audience began yelling, "Beef!" in one of the rest points in the piece and it kind of became part of our show. In fact, if you listen to the recording you can actually hear the audience yell it out. Reactions during the 2000 show were overwhelming. I believe we did something very substantial with communicating to the audience. That show gave the percussion section a lot of opportunity to display some very personal qualities in performance. The kids really connected with the audience. Tradition-

ally in drum corps, we've had a somewhat regimented approach especially from the battery percussion and that is a result of our attempts at uniformity. However, in segments of the 2000 show, you could easily see that the kids were communicating with the audience and being a little more relaxed. I would relate it to something you might see in a WGI indoor percussion show or perhaps similar to Blast. The response was overwhelming. Probably more than we would have expected. It was unbelievable how much people loved the corps and the communication with the audience. During the 2002 show, we added the Pledge of Allegiance to a part of the show and it got an overwhelming response. It was controversial in that some people didn't want to hear the Pledge of Allegiance in a drum corps show because they thought that was a place we didn't need to go and there were others who absolutely loved it.

MPN: Have you had moments where you thought the audience would respond and they didn't?

NL: We try to fix those. With the Cadets, we work to be in-tune with how the audience responds to our shows. It is a top priority in our design. We want the show to be very engaging for the audience. We want to play great quality literature and we want people to love it too and enjoy the show. So, we'll watch and listen. And if people don't seem to get out of their seats and start responding like we thought they would, we will dig into that and find out why it isn't delivering the effect or emotion we thought it would.

MPN: How does the experience of being a member of the Cadets make your kids better people?

NL: George Hopkins really leads the way in that area. He is very much interested in making the experience of being a Cadet, life changing. An experience that the kids can take with them and hopefully it provides an example of what they are capable of achieving in their lives. Hard work and diligence are important. His big thing is getting up everyday and going after it. He stresses hard work, commitment, and seeing things through. These are all concepts that we hope our own children understand. As a parent, I hope that my three kids have someone in their lives that empower them (beyond my wife and myself) to go the distance and do what it takes to be great. I believe that is a huge part of what a kid gets out of being a member of the Cadets. Working hard to perform musically and visually at a very high level is obviously a goal. Being able to walk away from the season, as a better person is probably the most important thing we do and we hope that future educators who were members of the Cadets are able to take examples of what we do and go out and spread better elements of teaching wherever they go.

MPN: Can you describe the concepts you use to create ensemble cohesion between winds, battery, and front ensemble in marching band?

NL: In marching band, we do not have the time that we have in drum corps. And yet at the same time, the kids in marching band have much less experience as drum corps players. So we have two conflicting factors. We don't have much time yet we need more time. It's a real challenge.

The key then is to write a show that is going to be very good and has a definitive probability of success. I don't think you can fool around in marching band. You don't have time to make mistakes or go through re-writes. We do that a lot in the summer and I think we do it to some degree because we can. I think that's part of the stimulation for the designers, kids and teachers. If you had the same show from day one to the end, I'm not sure if people wouldn't lose their minds. The kids usually enjoy the changes. We can't afford that in marching band. You need a design team that is very smart in their programming and they should know the level of ability of their kids. The designers need to be able to write a show that will be pretty darn close to what the kids perform at finals. You need a percussion arranger who is sensitive and mature enough to know how to support the brass and wind book and make it really sparkle, shine, and drive. You need a visual designer who is smart enough to put players in the right place at the right time. A visual designer also needs to know when to deliver the effects. Those are the design teams' most important responsibilities in marching band. If you hire me to write for a band I don't teach, I am going to ask a lot of questions. Who is the brass person? Is the person inexperienced? A veteran? Can the person deliver? The way I would write that percussion book would very much depend on that brass and wind person and the answers to those questions I just asked. If complexity is going to be a problem, my role is to write a percussion book that keeps the band together.

There also needs to be a sense of clarity. Many times, a more simplistic approach will not necessarily be the most popular approach for the performers and staff but it may be the better approach for the sake of the entire ensemble. There is a lot to consider before you write any notes on the page. The bands that are really successful are very good at that. It's not that they are great at squeezing in as many rudiments as possible to demonstrate their kids' ability. The role of percussion in marching band is a little different than in drum corps. In marching band, the focus is more on the overall band and less about just percussion. You can't expect that all performers in a marching band are going to be at an extremely high level because you've got freshmen mixed with seniors. It's not realistic that they will play at the same level.

MPN: As a judge, have you seen common design flaws in marching bands that hinder the potential for the kids?

NL: Yes. Some arrangers want to flex their muscles and show what they can do. That is often a concern with young arrangers. We probably have all been guilty of it at one point or another. You want to be noticed and you want your kids to be noticed. You feel that your students are well trained and you want them to be able to have the opportunity to show-off their stuff. As soon as we start thinking like that, we start to take ourselves away from the overall approach. And you can hear the percussion start to stand alone when you're trying to listen. Marching band adjudication is far different from drum corps adjudication. In drum corps, the percussion judge is right there on the field with the performers, running around the field and getting in front of the snares, tenors, bass, and

pit. Almost all band adjudication is done from the press box so the sense of how the percussion works with the brass and winds is an inherent responsibility for the judge to be considering.

MPN: You've been very busy judging indoor percussion shows. What makes a good judge?

NL: I think it is experience. I don't know if I'm a good judge but I know I have experience. (laughs) That's the only reason I put myself out there. I had enough encouragement from others saying they'd like to hear what I think that I was willing to put myself out there and try it. The same goes for marching band adjudication. I think that anyone who is being judged should judge as well. To critique a judge, you should also be a judge. I think that the reason experience is so important is that you can react to what's going on out there based on what you have done. We were fortunate to have a lot of success at King Philip and I involved myself in every level of the indoor percussion program whether it was the visual, props, costume design or arranging. I am comfortable commenting because I have been where every one of those teachers has been. I'm not saying I am always right about my assumptions or conclusions but at least it is based on experience. The most frustrating experience being judged in the past for me was having adjudication that was not based on a lot of experience. Being in the shoes of what the teacher is going through is a big plus. It meant a lot to me to be adjudicated by judges that had a lot of experience.

MPN: I've listened to some of your adjudication tapes and I enjoyed the fact that you pointed out issues but always gave advice on how the problems could be fixed. Sometimes, tapes just point out problems and stop at that.

NL: It's easy to sit and say things are wrong. Anyone can hear when there is a flaw. However, a good teacher has a solution to the problem. Also, a good teacher sometimes doesn't even need to say it's wrong because they are already focused on the solution. Just hearing what is wrong is not very enjoyable, rewarding or particularly affective for anyone.

MPN: What trends and innovations are directing the future of indoor percussion?

NL: I see continued growth. The activity is very, very exciting and I love the energy. I think we are going to plateau a little bit on visual design. I think we are going to begin to reign in the visual element where the visual is less concerning and upsetting for percussion directors. There are adjustments being made by WGI (Winter Guard International) with the ensemble analysis caption. There is going to be far more focus on the excellence of what you do rather than the opinion and presumption of what you should do and should have done. I also see a growth in the techniques of the non-battery players. We're seeing kids playing keyboards, timpani, and world percussion at a higher level. The adjudicators are beginning to concentrate more significantly when evaluating those players. Five or ten years ago that was not the case. We were overly concerned about the quality of the battery and would not pay nearly as much attention to what the front ensemble might be doing. (continued, pg 10)

MPN: It's obvious that you wear many hats: Cadets Drum and Bugle Corps, Vic Firth Inc., for many years you were the head of the King Philip High School Percussion Program, judging, freelance arranging, friends, and family. What are some secrets to prioritizing and making sure you have time for everything that is important in your life?

NL: You said it - you have to prioritize. You have to be able to list what is your highest priority in your life. And then the next most important priority, then the third, and so on. Being able to establish that list is key. Then you must never rob from the top priority to achieve the bottom priority. I can't be putting effort in for priority number ten if it takes away from priority number one. That is very important. There needs to be a balance. My top responsibility and priority in life is my family. That doesn't mean I will be home with them one hundred percent of the time. There is a balance. I have to work and I have to do things that make me live with happiness. Everyone has to establish his or her own percentages of what is the right balance. Is it fifty percent of the time home, thirty percent for work, ten percent to friends, and ten percent to church? Whatever it is you need to figure that out. With your conscious as your guide, you know when you are doing too much of one thing and not enough of another. Having made some adjustments in my life, I needed to discontinue teaching at King Philip. I don't say that as in there was a problem. But it was a place where I was spending extreme amounts of time. I was very much fulfilled by it but when I stacked up all the things that I wanted to do, the best thing for me was to make an adjustment there at King Philip. I left there on the best of terms and we were at the top of our game. I loved all the time I was there and I was never happier than when I left. I had to make more room in my life for all the other things including my family, job, and personal life. You think through everything you do, assess the order of priority, make the needed adjustments, and enjoy your life. 🎵

Interview by Scott Snow



Cadets 2003 Percussion Staff celebrates their third consecutive percussion title

MPN: 1983 was a very important year for Noble and Cooley. What was the company's innovation during that time?

JJ: That's when we started in the music division. A gentleman came in with a cracked Slingerland Radio King and asked if I could repair it or make him a new shell. With the old steam-bending equipment we had here that we used for tambourines and limited-production furniture I made him a new shell. He told me that there were a lot of people looking for this old Radio King-style drum and nobody was making them anymore and artists were looking for them in pawnshops and secondhand shops in search of this construction method for the drum. Not being a drummer myself, I was fortunate to get connected with Bob Gatzen at this stage and his innovative designs are in all of our products. So, that was our start.

MPN: And what is different about that method of constructing the shell?

JJ: It's taking one piece of wood and steaming it and bending it into a shell. That was the way of doing it for many, many years but after World War II, it was much easier putting together plywood cylinders. For speed of production, everything went to plywood and the one-piece solid wood-shell drum became history. However, a solid one-piece drum has its own fundamental pitch and resonance that is very clean. It goes to tape very nicely. This is what recording artists were looking for at the time. They couldn't find that clarity in a plywood drum.

MPN: Was the steam-bending machine also from the Civil War Era?

JJ: Yes, it was used to steam-bend all the wooden toy drums. They were bending 100,000 toy drum shells a year. They made their own veneer on site and they were steaming it to bend into the drum bodies and hoops. The steam naturally softens the wood.

MPN: Would having one piece of wood as the shell also contribute to its natural resonance?

JJ: Yes, when you start crossing the grain of plys you dampen a lot of natural resonance. It's not to say there aren't some very good sounding ply drums but fundamentally the solid wood drum sounds better.

MPN: How do your Symmetrical Ply Snare Drums create that "vintage" sound?

JJ: It's a sound people have grown up with. During the forties and early fifties, that is how drums were constructed so to meet a price point we began making a symmetrical ply drum because that was the sound people were used to hearing. We did put on flange hoops instead of die-cast to give them a softer feel and create that vintage effect. Drumming is not just the sound, it is also the feel for the artist. A die-cast hoop provides a tighter and harder surface to play on compared to a steel hoop.

MPN: What are the vintage enthusiasts looking for in a sound?

JJ: Drum sounds are very subjective to the artist. What one person likes may not appeal to another player.

MPN: It seems clear that your company prides itself on its ability to balance innovation with tradition. How have innovation and tradition played roles in the company's growth?

JJ: It started back in the early 1900's. I believe we were the first to build an eight-color printing press. It was built on-site and used to put eight colors and a coating of varnish on steel

and tin. This is back when wood production was waning in favor of tin. Printing on it was difficult. At that time, there were only two-color presses available. So, the innovation here was to take what was available as a two-color press and expand it to make an eight-color press. In one pass, they could put down a complete pattern and varnish it. That room was kept locked up in secret for years and years. They never went for a patent on it because once you patented something, it became public knowledge. At that point, anyone could have copied it and competed against us. That was an innovation in the early twenties that really catapulted us into the tin toy arena. We did the same thing to the solid wood drum. We took an old technology and re-introduced it.

MPN: The company's web site mentions "nodal point lug mounting." Can you explain that?

JJ: That is the point in the shell or any vibrating element where the waveforms cross and there is no vibration at that point. Like a marimba or xylophone bar can only be suspended at exact points. If you touch it anywhere else it mutes. By locating that wave pattern in a drum shell and mounting your hardware there, it leaves the shell more open to resonate.

MPN: How would that be determined?

JJ: You can get close to it with mathematical formulation but you can feel it. When you hold a stick of wood and tap it you can tell when it stops vibrating between your fingers and you can get a pitch out of it - that's the point. Then you drill holes into the shell and mount the hardware there.

MPN: So, you're using the natural physics of the instrument or material to try to get the greatest sound?

JJ: Right. You determine where to mount the hardware so it has least effect on the sound.

MPN: Congratulations on your Alloy Classic Snare winning 2nd place at the 5th Annual Snare Drum Olympics. Where was the competition held and what is unique about your Alloy Classic Snare Drum?

JJ: The Not-So Modern Drummer Publication ran the Snare Drum Olympics for five years. They are not having it this year but I believe they are next year. All drum manufacturers can send in a snare drum and it competes in blindfold tests. We were very pleased to come in second place in a work-horse category. It is a very versatile drum that can be used in just about any situation. We needed a metal snare drum in our line. There were a number of drummers who wouldn't play on a wooden snare drum no matter how good it was. The Radio King wooden drum was arguably one of the most sought-after recording instruments. We decided to look at what is arguably the most recorded metal snare drum and came upon the early forties Ludwig Black Beauty. We started researching the drum to discover what it was about that drum that goes to tape so well. Why do people seek out that drum for recording? After sampling half-a-dozen of them we sought to find a construction method to get a drum with those characteristics. We tried rolling welded aluminum, rolled brass, extruded aluminum, we altered thickness, and we finally came upon sand casting an aluminum alloy which has a higher silicon (continued, pg 12)

content making it a little harder and more resonant. It had all the sound characteristics we were looking for and it goes to tape very similarly to that old drum. Unlike that old drum, it sounds great live. It has much better cut and projection than the original drum had.

MPN: Didn't you use metal from Zildjian?

JJ: We made a snare drum back in 1989-90. We used a Zildjian Cymbal material. They provided us with the castings and we designed a drum around their alloy. We had a limited-production run on a 6.5-inch deep drum and we made another small run of a 5-inch deep drum. This year, we are re-introducing that drum for Zildjian's 380th birthday. We've made a couple other innovations on it such as stagger-mounted lugs to balance the amount of mass on the top and bottom of the shell. We wanted a drum with a different look so we tried putting a spiral groove on it.

This spiral design so drastically changed the characteristics of the drum that we had to go back to the drawing board to sample eight or ten more shells to find out what it was about that groove that changed the drum sound so much. We determined that the depth of the groove, the width of the groove, the amount of virgin material, the sharpness of the angles involved, all contributed to the sound of the drum. It was so drastic that a patent has been applied for. Bob Gatzel applied for the patent and I believe when it's awarded, Zildjian will be the owner of it. We are making a limited run of 500 pieces this year for their 380th birthday.

MPN: It's obvious that your company spends a great deal of time and energy on product testing.

JJ: Oh yes, theories are theories. Until you actually build prototypes and test them, you really don't know what you have.

MPN: Would you describe your Custom-Designed Maple Series?

JJ: A customer can choose any depth of shell he/she wants up to square. Choices include: die-cast hoops, flanged hoops, powder-coated black, chrome-plated, seventeen different colors, in all the artist has about 750 options for a drumset. We've designed the shells and the hardware to go together and give the optimal sound.

MPN: Your company has a lot of loyal artists that use your drums. Lee Levin (Christine Aguilera), Anthony Resta (Missing Persons) and Jim Rupp (currently playing with the legendary Woody Herman Orchestra) are a few. How does Noble and Cooley work together with your endorsing artists and how has that affected the company's growth?

JJ: We get solicitations from drummers almost daily from all over the world. Being a small company, we can't afford a large stable of full-line endorsers because we have a small product line and small production. We are very selective. Artists send in their resumes and we have a big file. We're not looking to sign up a lot of artists. If we can't afford to promote the artist than the artist is not going to be able to support us.

MPN: I saw a picture of you cutting down your own Maple Tree because of a problem with your supply lines. I'd love to hear that story.

JJ: New England had an extremely hard winter last year. We had three or four feet of snow. Also, we had periods with sub-zero temperatures. It was very difficult for loggers to get into the woods. Loggers usually go into the woods during winter because

the ground is frozen and it doesn't tear up the woods. It's much better for the ecology of the forest to take the wood out while the ground is frozen. The snow turned into an extended mud season so the loggers' machines were getting stuck in the mud. To make things worse, we had a very wet spring and it rained a lot straight through June. I couldn't get the clear maple that I needed. My normal three suppliers had eight logging crews all of which weren't doing anything because they just couldn't get into the woods. I have a 10-12 week lead time from the time I bend a shell until the time when I can glue it and make it into a drum. When I looked forward to see what I had for orders, I was going to have a shortfall. So, I took it upon myself to walk around the company property and found a decent-sized Maple Tree within a thousand feet of the office and cut it down and hauled the log to the sawyer and we continued our line of supply. In fact, I have a couple more trees if I need them.

MPN: That's great. It must have re-grounded you in the process as well.

JJ: We wear many hats around here and we do what we have to do. That was just something that had to be done. It was an afternoon's chore and it was kind of fun.

MPN: Noble and Cooley is advertised as the "World's Best Drums." What is unique about your drums?

JJ: It comes down to the sound and sound quality. All of our products are designed to record very well and very clean. A sound engineer can push the sound anywhere it needs to go. Within our drumsets, each drum was designed as an individual instrument to work together on a kit. We found through our research and trial that one-ply configuration doesn't work from an eight inch tom to an eighteen inch tom. So, we changed the number of plies depending upon diameter. It's something that people may not realize but we use six plies on the small toms, seven on the large, and eight on the bass drum. This creates a consistent sound characteristic from the small to large toms. They all work together. We claim we have the best sounding drums because of this consistency of sound.

MPN: What is in the future for Noble and Cooley Drum Company?

JJ: We will continue to sustain growth. We are moving away from the toy industry since we are finding it more difficult to compete with the Chinese on the toy end. All of the large retailers are going direct to China and importing direct and cutting out all the U.S. manufacturers, jobbers and distributors. So, we are focusing on the niche industry of the music category right now. We started on a whim twenty plus years ago and it is going to be carrying us into the next generation. We're celebrating our 150th birthday in 2004 and we hope to enjoy many years after that. 🎵

Interview by Scott Snow

A PEEK INSIDE THE NOBLE AND COOLEY DRUM FACTORY



Veneer machine



Disc Sander for snare drum edges



Steam Chest



Bending Machine for the Classic SS Snare



Clamping Station



Spray Booth



Indexing drilling station



Bass drum edge sander and drilling table



Micro-flat for checking bearing edges

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