



# Snare FUNdamentals

Ben Miller & John Papastefan

## HOW TO PRACTICE SNARE DRUM

### INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, most beginning drummers are taught a rudimental approach to the snare drum. This method of playing, though appropriate for certain rudimental-style solos and for drum corps and marching band, does not necessarily prepare the player to handle all of the musically demanding percussion parts in today’s compositions. Generally accepted and employed practices in snare drumming styles should be followed and taught regardless of one’s prior training, which is often over-balanced on the traditional and militaristic rudimental style.

The “right-hand lead” system of using the right hand on all strong pulses within a framework of four notes is usually employed by teachers and students alike. The “right-hand lead” system works because most people are right handed. By playing strong pulses with the right hand and the weak pulses with the left, natural and musical accents are achieved automatically, so to speak. This type of sticking is only applicable to the snare drum and, of course, students will ultimately strengthen and develop both hands through the use of technique studies.

### EQUIPMENT

Basic instruments and related items needed include: a practice pad mounted on an adjustable stand, or a snare drum (with a Gladstone pad) on a stand, a music stand, a well-lighted and well-ventilated room in which to practice, a reliable metronome, general-purpose sticks such as Firth SD-1, a copy of *Stick Control* by George Lawrence Stone, and at least one other substantial book such as *Modern School for Snare Drum* by Morris Goldenberg.

### BEFORE PRACTICE BEGINS

A number of factors must be considered before practice begins. Many players “put in” time without really knowing how to practice. To realize optimum value from practice time, the practice session must be directed toward specific goals. Furthermore, one should have both long and short range goals. You should have both “aural” and “visual” images in your mind of how a very fine player can perform. It is very important to hear excellent playing, both live and on recordings, so you will have some sense of direction to your practice. Ask yourself what your greatest weakness is at the moment. It could be the sound, facility, reading or simply the need to learn more new literature. Are there technical problems to overcome? How does the music you are working on now relate to these problems? With specific goals in mind, you will receive the most benefit from your practice.

### MATCHED OR TRADITIONAL GRIP?

The position of the snare drum (or practice pad) is altered slightly when the player utilizes the matched grip. Since the grip for both sticks is the same as the right hand of the traditional method, there is no need to tilt the drum. The instrument should be parallel to the floor. The top of the drum should be a few inches below belt height.



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With the matched grip, the muscular actions used in playing are the same in each hand, arm and wrist. This one factor alone will enable the player to progress more quickly and efficiently than with the traditional grip. Many of the problems encountered while teaching beginners can be traced to the somewhat unnatural left-hand portion of the traditional grip. This can result in excessive teaching and practice time being devoted to making corrections of the left hand. With the matched grip, special left-hand problems are almost eliminated.

Muscular transference between the different percussion instruments is another point in favor of the matched grip. If the basic areas of percussion (snare drum, timpani, mallet-keyboard, drumset, multiple, etc.) are played using a similar grip, the student will progress more quickly toward becoming a well-rounded percussionist.

The matched grip adapts very well to the drumset, especially the now popular melodic tom-tom setups, and to the increasingly difficult solo multiple percussion repertoire. The traditional grip evolved as a result of the snare drum being carried originally and exclusively on a sling. With the advent of newer devices designed to carry the marching drum "level," there may be very little need for the traditional grip. Many drum corps and marching bands now use matched grip as a result of the newer carrying devices being available.

Inasmuch as today's percussionist is often expected to play a wide variety of instruments (and play them very well!), the matched grip has tremendous advantage in versatility and flexibility when moving from one instrument to another. While the traditional grip is in no way obsolete, the matched grip is recommended for training the total percussionist and indeed serves as the consistent approach to percussion education and performance for many successful percussionists.

### WHEN AND HOW LONG TO PRACTICE

Most musicians who plan to become professional players will practice at least four hours per day, perhaps even more while in college, conservatory or equivalent level of study. It is a good idea to practice as often as possible, the following minimum guidelines are recommended:

Grade school/junior high	45 minutes per day
High school	1 hour per day
College and beyond	2 hours per day

It is not wise to suddenly embark on long and intense practice sessions. Rather, the preferred method would be to gradually increase the practice session by one-quarter to one-half hour each day until the desired number of hours have been reached.



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Some musicians prefer to practice early in the day when they are fresh and fully awake, others prefer to practice late in the day or night when other pressing matters have been set aside and there may be fewer distractions. Another very real consideration may be times when practice facilities and instruments are available, especially in a university or conservatory.

### HOW AND WHAT TO PRACTICE

The ideal practice session must consist of a warm-up period, technical work, solo and ensemble literature, sight reading and perhaps finally, a “cool down” period to relax the mind and muscles before practice ends for the day.

Creating a good practice attitude is very important. The practice session should be viewed with enthusiasm, pleasure and eagerness to achieve, rather than a chore or boring or drudgery. A positive attitude has direct influence on the levels of concentration, care and patience in a practice session.

Concentration involves the use of your complete mind. Do not think of other things while you are practicing. Take care that you are indeed playing the correct notes, rhythms, dynamics, etc. Always check and double check to make sure that mistakes are not creeping into your work. Often it is more difficult to “unlearn” mistakes that have been practiced for a period of time. Students often learn pieces badly because they are impatient. Passages should not be played any faster than they can be played well. Instead of trying to learn a long piece all at once, divide it into sections, learning one at a time. Do not hesitate to count aloud. Finally, as it sometimes happens, do not become discouraged if you cannot play something as well today as you could yesterday.

### USE OF THE METRONOME

The original purpose of the metronome was only to provide a reference with which tempos could be accurately measured and specified. There are various schools of thought among musicians concerning use of the metronome. Practicing with a metronome has been criticized by some musicians as “making you too mechanical.” Still others maintain that only through discipline will freedom evolve. To acquire concert-performance control of rhythm, with all its nuances, a knowledge of the subtle use of metronome technique is quite necessary.

The two primary uses of the metronome are: to set an absolute tempo (number of beats per minute) and to act as a guide in learning complex rhythms. Because percussionists are expected to have flawless rhythm and the ability to hold steady tempos, use of the metronome is absolutely essential. The value of using a metronome when practicing cannot be overly emphasized. Many performance problems related to “rushing” or “dragging” would be virtually eliminated by using a metronome for all practice sessions.



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The metronome can be used in teaching memory of tempos. A composition is begun with the metronome and then the metronome is turned off. Later during the playing at presumably uniform tempo, the instructor checks the tempo and can inform the student(s) exactly how much the tempo has drifted. Just as some musicians can acquire a sense of absolute (or nearly absolute) pitch, so musicians can acquire a sense of absolute (or nearly absolute) tempo.

Training the muscles, eyes, ears and minds of young players requires enormous amounts of repetitive drill in order to achieve superior results. Unfortunately, many young people today who are victims of the “immediate gratification syndrome” lack the necessary discipline to become truly good performers. There simply is not a shortcut for the methodical, logical and gradual development of one’s playing ability over a period of time.

## OTHER AIDS FOR PRACTICING

In addition to the metronome, other teaching and learning aids can and should be utilized as the need arises. Playing along with a CD or cassette recording is very useful. To learn the symphonic repertoire, play the percussion part along with the recording. One can repeat certain passages over and over. The music-minus-one concept is a very good one, whereby all the parts are recorded on the recording except your part, which you are to perform and blend in with the recording.

The tape recorder is especially helpful for recording lessons and practice sessions, then playing back to listen, analyze, and critique your own ability. Another use of the tape recorder is to record the piano accompaniment to the solo or recital piece you intend to perform. By practicing with the tape you will become more familiar with the piano accompaniment and learn exactly how your part fits with the rest of the music.

The videotape is another useful tool for practice and study. A number of very fine instructional videotapes have been made by outstanding professionals, too numerous to mention here. When a video camera is available, you can record not only how you sound but also how you look, an additional aspect of performance. By viewing the videotape, one can readily recognize any physical problems in the setup or in one’s playing technique.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, understanding styles of drumming is also an important aspect of practicing. It is unfortunate to hear a drummer play eighth notes in strict fashion if the composer has indicated that a syncopated style is to be used. It is just as unfortunate as well as annoying to hear a drummer give a free syncopated interpretation to eighth notes if a strict and literal rendition is intended.

The best method of gaining control and technique of various drumming styles is to have experience in playing them in ensembles, which employ them most frequently. A well rounded experience is essential in order to meet the demands of today’s musical requirements, unless the individual drummer never expects to perform in any but the one or two types of organizations in which he or she may have had some experience.



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A major problem in band and orchestral snare drumming is attaining the control demanded to play a wide variety of dynamics without losing control. The most difficult types of passages are the soft, rapid series of strokes and the *pp* roll, especially when these occur as solos. These two problem techniques should be practiced on the drum rather than on the practice pad. The ultimate goal of practice is to be able to play a passage at any dynamic level and speed without losing control. "One of the most effective ways of reaching this goal is to practice exercises from books such as *Stick Control* by George L. Stone and *The Drummer's Rudimental Reference Book* by John Wooton."

**Individual Snare Drum Methods and Supplemental Studies From  
*Teaching Percussion* (2nd. Ed.) by Gary Cook**

**SNARE DRUM TECHNIQUE**

*Practical Method of Developing Finger Control* by Roy Burns and Lewis Malin (Warner Bros.).

*Master Technique Builders for Snare Drum* edited by Anthony Cirone (Warner Bros.).

*Encyclopedia for Snare Drum* by Forrest Clark (Professional Drum Shop, Inc., TRY Publishing Co.).

*Accent on Accents*, Books I and II by Elliot Fine and Marvin Dahlgren (Warner Bros.).

*Chop Busters* by Ron Fink (Fink Publications).

*Master Studies* by Joe Morello (Modern Drummer/Hal Leonard).

*The Snare Drum in the Concert Hall* by Al Payson (Meredith Music Publications).

*Developing Dexterity for Snare Drum* by Mitchell Peters (Mitchell Peters).

*Odd Meter Calisthenics for the Snare Drummer* by Mitchell Peters (Mitchell Peters).

*Accents and Rebounds for the Snare Drummer* by George Lawrence Stone (Ludwig Music Publishing Co.).

*Stick Control for the Snare Drummer* by George Lawrence Stone (Ludwig Music Publishing Co.).

*Wrist and Finger Stroke Control for the Advanced Drummer* by Charles Wilcoxon (Ludwig Music Publishing Co.).

*Contemporary Rudimental Studies & Solos* by Lalo Davila (Vision Publications)



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## ELEMENTARY

*The Performing Percussionist, Book I* by James Coffin (C. L. Barnhouse Co.) [total percussion].

*Vic Firth Snare Drum Method, Book 1, Elementary* by Vic Firth (Carl Fischer) [snare drum only].

*Beginning Snare Drum Method* with play-along cassette by Al Payson (Payson Percussion Products) [snare drum only].

*Fundamental Studies for Snare Drum* by Garwood Whaley (Joel Rothman Publications) [snare drum only].

## INTERMEDIATE

*Portraits in Rhythm* by Anthony J. Cirone (Warner Bros.) [intermediate through advanced material].

*Portraits in Rhythm—Study Guide* by Anthony J. Cirone (Warner Bros.).

*The Performing Percussionist, Book II* by James Coffin (C. L. Barnhouse Co.) [total percussion including drumset].

*Vic Firth Snare Drum Method, Book II, Intermediate* by Vic Firth (Carl Fischer).

*Modern School for Snare Drum with A Guide Book for the Artist Percussionist* by Morris Goldenberg (Hal Leonard) [intermediate through advanced material].

*Intermediate Snare Drum Studies* by Mitchell Peters (Mitchell Peters) [snare drum only].

*Standard Snare Drum Method* by Benjamin Podemski (Warner Bros.) [intermediate through advanced material].

*Musical Studies for the Intermediate Snare Drummer* by Garwood Whaley (Joel Rothman Publications).

*Rhythmic Patterns of Contemporary Music* by Garwood Whaley and Joseph M. Mooney (Joel Rothman Publications) [intermediate through advanced material].



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## ADVANCED

*Contemporary Studies for the Snare Drum* by Fred Albright (Warner Bros.).

*Speed, Power, Control, Endurance* by Jim Chapin—video/booklet (Warner Bros.).

*The Solo Snare Drummer—Advanced Etudes and Duets* by Vic Firth (Carl Fischer).

*Modern School for Snare Drum with a Guide Book for the Artist Percussionist* by Morris Goldenberg (Hal Leonard).

*Time and Motion* by Fred Hinger (Jerona Music Corp.).

*The Snare Drum in the Concert Hall* by Al Payson (Meredith Music Pub.).

*Advanced Snare Drum Studies* by Mitchell Peters (Mitchell Peters).

## SUPPLEMENTAL STUDIES

### ELEMENTARY

#### Highly recommended:

*The Beginning Snare Drummer: A Musical Approach* by Morris Lang (Lang Percussion/Music for Percussion, Inc.) [snare drum only].

*Contemporary Drum Method, Book 1* by Michael LaRosa (Somers Music Publications) [snare drum, multiple percussion studies and duets].

*Logical Approach to Snare Drum, Vol. 1* by Phil Perkins (Logical Publications) [snare drum only].

*Developing Dexterity for Snare Drum* by Mitchell Peters (Mitchell Peters) [snare drum technique only].

*Primary Handbook for Snare Drum* by Garwood Whaley (Meredith Music Publications) [snare drum and multiple drum studies].



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## Also recommended:

*Logical Approach to Rhythmic Notation* by Phil Perkins (Logical Publications).

*Teaching Rhythm for All Instruments/Class or Individual Instruction* by Joel Rothman (Joel Rothman Publications) [rhythms only].

*Basics in Rhythm* by Garwood Whaley (Meredith Music Publications).

## INTERMEDIATE

### Highly recommended:

*Flams, Ruffs and Rolls for Snare Drum* by John Beck (Meredith Music Publications).

*The Snare Drum Roll and Rudiments Interpretation* by Gary Olmstead (Permus Publications).

*Logical Approach to Snare Drum, Vol. II* by Phil Perkins (Logical Publications).

*Audition Etudes for Snare Drum, Timpani, Keyboard Percussion, and Multiple Percussion* by Garwood Whaley (Meredith Music Publications).

*Intermediate Duets for the Snare Drum* by Garwood Whaley (Joel Rothman Publications).

*Snare Drum Solos for the Advanced Beginner* by Garwood Whaley (Meredith Music Pub.).

*Solos and Duets for Snare Drum* by Garwood Whaley (Meredith Music Publications).

### Also recommended:

*Modern Reading Text in 4/4* by Louis Bellson and Gil Bredes (Warner Bros.).

*Odd Time Reading Text* by Louis Bellson and Gil Bredes (Warner Bros.) [intermediate to advanced material].

*Method for Snare Drum* by Jacques Delecluse (Alphonse Leduc) [snare drum only, intermediate through advanced material].

*22 Progressive Studies, Etudes, and Duets for Snare Drum* by David Eyler (Music for Percussion).



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*Siegfried Fink: Studies for Snare Drum, Vols. 1-6* by Siegfried Fink (N. Simrock) [elementary through advanced material].

*Logical Approach to Rudimental Snare Drum* by Phil Perkins (Logical Publications).

### ADVANCED

#### Highly recommended:

*Concert Percussion: A Performer's Guide, vols. I and II* [videos] by Anthony Cirone, Sam Denov, and Cloyd Duff (Warner Bros.).

*Rhythmic Analysis for the Snare Drum, with Introduction to Polyrhythms* by Fred Albright (Warner Bros.).

*Douze Eludes for Snare Drum* by Jacques Delecluse (Alphonse Leduc).

*The Rhythms of Contemporary Music—A Rhythmic Teaching Aid for All Instruments* (complete edition), by Joseph Leavitt (CPP/Belwin).

*Concert Etudes for Snare Drum* by Al Payson and James Lane (Payson Percussion Products).

*Recital Duets for Snare Drum* with CD “duet accompaniment” by Garwood Whaley (Meredith Music Publications).

*Recital Solos for Snare Drum* by Garwood Whaley (Meredith Music Publications).

#### Also recommended:

*Sight Reading and Audition Etudes* by Ron Fink (Fink Publications).

*Contemporary Collection for Snare Drum* by Murray Houllif (Warner Bros.).

*Contemporary Album for the Snare Drum* by Stanley Leonard (Ludwig Music Publishing Co.).

*Fifty Contemporary Snare Drum Eludes* by Alexander Lepak (Windsor Music Publishers).

*26 Contemporary Snare Drum Duets* by Alexander Lepak (Windsor Music Publishers).

The following exercises are taken from *The Drummer's Rudimental Reference Book* by John Wooton, published by Row-Loff Publications. We thank John and Row-Loff for giving us permission to use them for this PASIC FUNdamentals session.

1  
4/4  
R R R R R R R R R R ...  
L ...

2  
4/4  
R R R ...  
L ...

3  
4/4  
R R R ...  
L ...

4  
4/4  
R R R ...  
L ...

5  
4/4  
R R R ...  
L ...

6  
4/4  
R R R ...  
L ...

7  
4/4  
R R R ...  
L ...

8   
 RRRRRRRR RR R ...  
 L ...

9   
 RRRRRR LLLLL 7/8 R... L... 10/8 R... L ...

10   
 RRRRRR LLLLL 7/8 R... L... 10/8 R... L ...

11   
 RRRRRRR ...  
 L ...

12   
 RRRRRR ...  
 L ...

13   
 RRRRRR ...  
 L ...

14   
 RRRRRR ...  
 L ...

15   
 RRRRRR ...  
 L ...

16   
 RRRRRR ...  
 L ...

1 check pattern

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L || L R L L R L L R L L R L L R L L

L ...

2

R R L R R L R R L R R L || R L L R L L R L L R L L

4

R L R R L R R L R R L R || L L L L L L L L L L L L

6

R R R R R R R R || R L R L R L R L

8

R L R L R L R L || R L R L R L R L

10

L R L R L R L R || L L L L L L L L

12

R R R R || L L L L

14

R R R R || R

4

4/4

R L R L R L R L R L R R R R | L R L R L R L R L R L R L L L L

5

4/4

R L R R L R L L R R L L R R L L | R L R L R L R L R R R L R R R

L R L L R ...

6

4/4

R L R R L R L L R L L L R L L L | R L L L L R R R R L L L L R R R

L R L L R ...

7

4/4

R R R L R L R R R L R L R R R L | R L L L R L L L R L L L R L R R

L L L R L ...

8

5/4

R R R L R L R R R L R L R R R | L L L R L R L L L R L R L L L R L R L L

9

4/4

R L R R R L R R R L R R R L R R | L R L L L R L L L L R L L L L R L L L

10

4/4

R R R L L L R R R L L L R R | L L L R R R L L L R R R L L

11

4/4

R L R R L L L R L R L L L R R R L | R L L L R L L L R L R R L L R L

12

4/4

R L R L R L R L L R R L R | L R L R L L R L R L R R L R L L