

The Benefits of an Old School Approach

by Phil Smith

With the proliferation of technology, finding something to practice is seldom an issue. Instead, most students discover so many things to work on that they never completely master one thing before moving on to the next “chop du jour.” Working on one particular groove or lick is fine. However, a consistent diet of one-offs leaves students unfocused with limited resources to pull from when they find themselves in a demanding gig situation. These scattered and incomplete studies often lead to frustration and, in performance, an overall lack of musical depth. In my teaching practice, I have found that until traditional methodology is incorporated, students remain untethered from the foundational vocabulary used by the master musicians they often try to emulate.

Traditional methods have consistently proven themselves to produce their intended results and are as relevant today as when they were first introduced. These methods have become works of art that have furthered our understanding and enjoyment of our discipline. Instead of providing a singular groove or lick, these great books strengthen our overall vocabulary providing a strong foundation that we need in order to be successful, working musicians. All that being said, I do not disavow newer methods. We should always be striving for good, new ideas; these are necessary to advance our art form. However, I am a firm believer that any new pathway must be steeped in tradition. You can only build an addition to an existing house that has a solid foundation. Furthermore, new ideas only survive long term if they are comprised of foundational substance.

Most classic texts were written to

focus on particular needs that at one time were not otherwise addressed. Naturally, the explanations and exercises in these books speak appropriately to students and professionals, needing this information, and good ideas generally produce good results. If a student needs basic technique and reading, a great place to start would be *Stick Control* by George Lawrence Stone. Someone needing help with fundamental jazz independence may want to work out of *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer* by Jim Chapin. *Funky Primer* by Charles Dowd is an excellent method for those wanting to improve their command of backbeat-oriented grooves. For a student who may need help interpreting music for concert snare drum, a good place to start would be *Modern School for Snare Drum* by Morris Goldenberg. Each of the aforementioned methods is either the first of its kind or was the first to effectively capsize the concepts addressed.

We also find value in these definitive books from the many successful musicians who praise their usefulness. It doesn't take many interviews to discover that the vast majority of our favorite players have studied (and currently teach) from these long-established methods. When you find that great players as radically different as Tony Williams and Jason Bittner have worked from many of the same books, you are forced to acknowledge that there must be something special found in those pages. In addition, we have many “celebrity” teachers who regularly discuss the importance and continued use of these tried-and-true methods. These legacy users reassure the integrity of these authoritative methods.

As students, we seek instructors who will give us access to information that we can't discover or expediently learn on our

own. Like any other service, we look for teachers who possess a track record of success with prior students and who are known for their ability to communicate precisely. That being said, our drumming language is built upon vocabulary that has been created by the methods we learn. Thus, it's vitally important as a student to be familiar with these terms, not only from conversational practicality but also as a potential future teacher. It is consistently impressed upon my students that no matter where your travels take you, these conventional methods are likely familiar to other drummers and competent instructors.

Another invaluable aspect of these great texts is their clarity in mission. As students, this unambiguous and objective style of study is one of the essential parts of your education. Having a clear objective that is not mitigated by opinion should be of paramount importance. Don't be concerned about the focus of these books limiting your creativity; they won't. Remember that we call artistic endeavors “disciplines” for a reason. These concepts may indeed narrow your focus temporarily. However, upon completion, the knowledge you have gained will open new doors of creativity that you never knew existed. These definitive methods have clear, universally accepted concepts that are a part of our percussion lexicon. Over decades of use, these books are no longer opinions, but rather are the standard-bearers for truth in our educational journey.

Many of these older methods seem somewhat dry compared to new books and videos that are currently being produced. Almost all of the modern material comes with CDs, DVDs, and companion websites. All of that is helpful for sure. However, it is critical to compare the subject matter. In virtually every instance, you'll discover

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF DEFINITIVE METHOD BOOKS

Snare Drum Technique

Stick Control – George Lawrence Stone

Accents and Rebounds – George Lawrence Stone

Master Studies – Joe Morello

Concert Snare Drum

Modern School for Snare Drum – Morris Goldenberg

Podemski Standard Snare Drum Method – Benjamin Podemski

Portraits in Rhythm – Anthony Cirone

Method for Snare Drum – Jacques Delecluse

Rudimental Snare Drum

150 Solos for the All-American Drummer – Charles Wilcoxon

Rudimental Swing Solos – Charles Wilcoxon

America's NARD Drum Solos – NARD membership/Ludwig publishing

Buddy Rich's Modern Interpretation of Snare Drum Rudiments – Henry Adler/
Ted Mackenzie

Keyboard Percussion

Modern School for Xylophone, Marimba, Vibraphone – Morris Goldenberg

George Hamilton Green's Instruction Course for Xylophone – George Hamilton Green

Method of Movement for Marimba – Leigh Howard Stevens

Drum Set: Jazz Independence

Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer – Jim Chapin

Progressive Steps to Syncopation – Ted Reed

Art of Bop Drumming – John Riley

Drum Set: Jazz Brushes

The Sound of Brushes – Ed Thigpin

Brush Artistry – Philly Joe Jones

Drum Set: Funk/Fusion Independence

The New Breed – Gary Chester

Advanced Funk Studies – Rick Latham

Future Sounds – David Garibaldi

Drum Set: Rock and Roll/General

Funky Primer – Charles Dowd

The Drumset Musician – Rod Morgenstein and Rick Mattingly

Realistic Rock – Carmine Appice

Double Bass Drumming – Joe Franco

Drum Set: Latin Styles

Afro Cuban Rhythms for Drum Set – Frank Malabe and Bob Weiner

Brazilian Rhythms for Drum Set – Duduka Da Fonseca and Bob Weiner

one of two things: either the new approach is a rehash or it's an advanced extension of the original method. My philosophy would suggest the student consult the traditional source first; the authors of the new literature certainly did! In so many ways, the later books are de facto citations of the canonical texts. That fact alone is a great indicator of the importance of the original book. If a new method is a written restatement, it only makes sense to learn the information first-hand from its predecessor. In other words, would you rather see a great classic rock band or a classic rock tribute band? If a new book is presenting progressive concepts based on the older edition, you'd want to master the original in order to understand and absorb the more advanced information in the newer book. Time and time again, I discover that knowing the bibles of drumming often provides an understanding of other methods that might seem unrelated. What we quickly find is that this timeless information is in the DNA of everything we do as percussionists. These enduring books are a portal into what makes us what we are, and they connect us through their omnipotence.

Ultimately, there are many different and valuable aspects of learning our discipline's standard teaching methods. The underlying principle is that the information found in these books is undeniably true and has been repeatedly used with success. Regardless of whether you are the teacher or student, the truth is what we should all be striving to discover, learn, and pass on to the next generation.

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He has had numerous articles published in various media forms, including *Modern Drummer* magazine and Steve Smith's *Drum Set Technique and the History of the U.S. Beat* DVD. Phil Smith is also the host of the popular drumming podcast *Drummer's Weekly Groovecast*.