

MASSACHUSETTS PERCUSSION NEWS

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Massachusetts Percussion News is published three times annually.

- September
- January
- May



Percussive Arts Society Mission Statement:

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

A CONVERSATION WITH NEIL GROVER

Neil Grover is a world-renowned cymbal, tambourine, and triangle specialist. For the past twenty years, he has performed with the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops. Additional credentials include performances with the Royal Ballet of England, Boston Musica Viva, American Ballet Theatre, Bolshoi Ballet, and Boston Symphony Chamber Players.

As founder and president of Grover Pro Percussion, Inc., Neil Grover's innovative designs and manufacturing techniques have catapulted the standards of excellence in the percussion industry. Neil was formerly an adjunct professor of music at the Boston Conservatory and the University of Massachusetts. Neil holds the distinction of serving on both the Board of Directors and the Sustaining Members Advisory Council of the Percussive Arts Society. Neil is also the president of Silverfox Drumsticks Inc.



RPM: What are the essentials for teaching crash cymbal technique?

NG: Proper grip is important. The player should distribute his/her weight evenly between the two legs. The player should stand up straight. The use of a flam motion is vital. In other words, the edges of the plates (cymbals) should not meet perfectly together. There should be a flam between the plates. The player should be very relaxed and without tension. Being natural is important. It should feel almost like you're throwing the cymbals together.

RPM: Neil, you present a lot of clinics on symphonic percussion performance. Do you see a lot of similar crash cymbal technique flaws in young players?

NG: Yes, a lot of players are tense. They hold the cymbals too tightly and the result is that they do not ring. They try to smash the plates together aggressively instead of letting the cymbals meet.

RPM: What are some tuning tips on how to make a concert snare drum sound great?

NG: The bottom head should not be too tight because it will sound choked. The two heads should be tensioned similarly meaning one head shouldn't be real tight and the other real loose. They should both be close in tension otherwise there is no coupling in the heads.

The most common mistake is that the bottom head is way too tight. I bring the bottom head up just tight enough to get rid of all the wrinkles and then I give it a half a turn on the key more.

RPM: How should a teacher help a student to develop a good quality buzz roll?

NG: I'm of the belief that you have to learn how to play an open stroke roll first. A player needs to build the muscles to play a very clean open stroke roll (two strokes per hand). Then you develop that to triplets (three strokes per hand), then four strokes per hand, and then the player can go into a relaxed mode of rolling. I believe in a very slow buzz roll with multiple bounces. A common problem is that many people try to do a buzz roll before they develop an open roll and in doing so the wrist and finger muscles are never properly developed.

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EDUCATORS AND PDP'S

Berklee College of Music is awarding Professional Development Points to teachers who attend the Day of Percussion event at Berklee and Umass. See our web site for complete details: [Http://www.pas.org/chapters/massachusetts](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.

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 VISIT OUR WEB SITE:

[Http://www.pas.org/chapters/massachusetts](http://www.pas.org/chapters/massachusetts)

VODOU DRUMSET:

James Armstrong discusses Traditional Afro-Haitian Music

James Armstrong holds a Bachelor of Music Education degree from Central Michigan University and a Master of Music Performance (emphasis in jazz studies and ethnomusicology) from Bowling Green State University. He is a specialist in Haitian, Cuban, and West African folkloric drumming, and has done extensive field research and performance of this music throughout the United States and abroad. He has also done extensive fieldwork in Ghana, West Africa, where he has studied and performed with several master musicians in the cultural context. Apart from his world music background, he is also an accomplished drumset artist, jazz vibraphonist (winning several awards nationwide for arranging and soloing), and symphonic percussionist, as well as a respected clinician and educator throughout North America and abroad.

*Jim has recorded and toured with the Robert Hohner Percussion Ensemble (1984-2000), and can be heard on the DMP releases *Different Strokes*, *World Music Tour*, and *The Percussion Music of David Maslanka*. He can also be heard with Smallstone artists *Five Horse Johnson* (*Blues for Henry*, *Double Down*). Jim can be seen performing with *Rising Sign* (9piece salsa band), and various groups throughout the central New York region, as well as with his own folkloric percussion trio. He also performs frequently in New York City and throughout the eastern United States as a freelance artist.*

*Currently, Jim is the Director of Percussion Ensembles at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. His duties include directing the Percussion Ensemble, the Cornell Steel Band, and the CU World Drum-Dance Ensemble, as well as guest lecturing in several music courses. He also teaches privately at 171 Cedar Arts Center (Corning, NY) and at his home. Jim is the co-author of *Vodou Drumset: Traditional Afro-Haitian Rhythms Applied to Drumset* (Carl Fischer Publications), and has several solo percussion and percussion ensemble pieces published (Drop6 Media). Apart from his teaching and performing schedule, Jim travels extensively as a clinician (world percussion, drumset, and vibraphone) for Yamaha, Sabian, and Vic Firth.*



MPN: How did you become interested in Afro-Haitian Music?

JA: It started when I was going to school for my Master's Degree. I was thrown into the fire when I joined the BGSU Afro-Caribbean Ensemble. I began playing a lot of Bata and got the opportunity to go abroad and study with master musicians in Ghana, West Africa. It was ultimately through that experience that I became interested in Haitian Vodou music.

There were a few pieces of literature incorporating this music but nobody had really tapped into it so I chose Haitian Vodou music as my Master's Thesis. I began seeking teachers in New York, New Orleans, and Miami. I began studying with John Amira and I am still studying and performing with him. He is one of the top authorities on Haitian Vodou performance practice on the East Coast.

MPN: What's the difference between Vodou and Voodoo?

JA: The words are certainly pronounced differently. (Vodou is pronounced VOH-DOO) "Voodoo" is a term created by the media more than anything. There are many stereotypes surrounding this music and that is something Travis Knepper and I cover during our clinics. We try to dispel a lot of those myths. When people think of "Voodoo," they usually think pin dolls and black magic and that is not the case at all. Films made in the fifties and sixties portrayed these images that stuck in people's minds. Some people don't take the time to seek out the correct information, therefore they remain ignorant in a sense. The Vodou religion is not the only religion in which this happens. (continued on next page)

Other religions have also been stereotyped in this way, including many indigenous religions to West Africa, Santaria or Lucumi in Cuba, and Candomble in Brazil. There is a lot of incorrect information out there.

MPN: Why is drumming so important to Vodou ceremonies?

JA: It's considered by a lot of people who perform the music to be one of the closest West African retentions, as far as the style and energy levels. Many of these rhythms are completely African-derived. It is a very ancestral music and religion. The music itself is functional. A comparison would be if you were to attend a Catholic Service here, you have a choir and hymns to facilitate certain things in the Mass. In Vodou Ceremonies, drums (as well as dance and song) are used to facilitate. Drums are used to accompany songs, accompany dance, and ultimately facilitate an altered state of consciousness with certain individuals that are initiated.

MPN: So, the idea of drums helping you get into a trance state would be to intensify your spiritual connection?

JA: Yes. This is something we didn't even go into with the book but it is very complex. The rhythms included in the book are bare-bones. In fact, they are about as basic as you can get. For example, in the Yanvalou Rhythm you have conversations that occur. The master drummer will introduce new variations to mark a singer or dancer. One concept that is crucial to altered states of consciousness is the Kasé or the break. This is a complete twist within the rhythm, both on the part of the Maman and the Seconde. The kasé facilitates a vulnerability to an initiate and helps that person to achieve that altered state of consciousness. If a master drummer is marking one of the dancers, and can see that person on the verge of that state, he might throw in a kasé and the dance steps become completely different. It throws the dancer off balance and that's the best way to describe it. It is very functional music. When we are playing a ceremony for instance, and someone was not to become "mounted" by Lwa (spirit, deity) than we would not be doing our job. Our job is to create that energy level and that aesthetic within the ceremony. It's not just the drumming, it's the singing, dancing, and everything combined.

MPN: I forget that there is that interactive element between drummers and dancers. It's not just drummers laying down a groove in the background.

JA: Absolutely. It's one of the biggest retentions of the West African Culture. Call and response - communication. It happens between the song leader and the master drummer, drummers to dancers, dancers to drummers, drummers to drummers - it's very complex.

MPN: What are some hand drum techniques unique to the music of Vodou?

JA: Completely unique to the tradition would be things like rim tones. You would approach rim tones similarly to a rim shot on a snare drum. The bagét used by the Maman is unique, although very close to many West African drumming traditions. The seconde will often use a stick called an adjida. There are glisses and moans on the head called cié's. There is one style that is unique called Djuba, in which the Maman player will set the drum on his side and play while sitting on top. The maman player will change the pitch of the head with his heel. Very difficult to master.

MPN: Maman is the leader or the biggest drum?

JA: Yes. The mother drum.

MPN: Would that person in the leadership position have liberties to change the direction of what everyone is doing?

JA: Yes, absolutely. That is pretty much the master drummer's responsibility. If a song is called by the song leader, the master drummer needs to know what rhythm. If a person is mounted or in a trance state and begins dancing a particular step, the master drummer needs to know what rhythm goes with that step. The master drummer also has the responsibility to know all the parts in case someone gets off track. He would also call little conversations and variations to facilitate this energy. To make it as exciting as possible.

MPN: How do countries like Haiti and the United States differ in their ways of involving music into their cultures?

JA: Music is more intrinsic to West African-based cultures like Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil than in the United States. We can turn our music on and off, whereas the cultures listed above use music as a crucial part of their daily lives. People from certain cultures may awake in the morning to sing spiritual songs, hoping they're going to make it through the day with food on the table. Music is a vital part of daily living, whereas in the United States we often consider music to be art and of secondary importance.

MPN: How can drumset players incorporate Afro-Haitian Rhythms into their playing?

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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 further develop this newsletter.

JA: Travis and I are both hand drummers, as well as, drumset players. Our underlying premise for writing the book was to present this unique style of drumming and in turn help players incorporate these concepts into their own gigs without getting fired! We don't want the bass player to turn around and say, "What was that?" We hope that players will use our book to incorporate these rhythms and concepts into their own playing situation. One unique feature of our book are the bridge exercises.

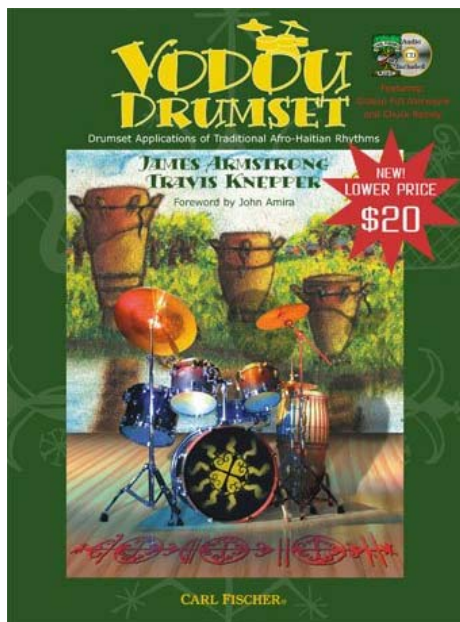
MPN: You and Travis Knepper present a lot of drumset clinics. What concepts do you hope to convey?

JA: We hope people walk out of our clinics having learned about a very deeply rooted tradition and complex drumming style, while giving them ideas of how they approach and play drumset. We also hope people take the information we have presented and experiment creatively within their own playing situation. Our clinics cover a lot of material, starting with us playing the traditional rhythms on hand drums. By the end, we have a play-along section and try whenever possible to get audience members involved. Even though we are presenting a drumset clinic, we are still dealing with a tradition that should be respected. 🎵

Interview by Scott Snow

For information on "Vodou Drumset" visit our website at www.vodoudrumset.com

* Also, James Armstrong and Trevor Knepper are presenting a clinic at next year's PASIC in Kentucky.



Neil Grover Interview Continued:

RPM: What are some pieces in the symphonic literature that contain great examples of timpani, auxiliary, and concert snare drum playing?

NG: Scheherazade, Op. 35 - Rimsky-Korsakov, Capriccio Espagnol, Op. 34 - Rimsky-Korsakov, Capriccio Italien, Op. 45 - Tchaikovsky, Festive Overture - Shostakovich, Selections from Carmen - Bizet, West Side Story Suite - Bernstein

RPM: What are the most important things a band director should teach regarding tambourine and triangle?

NG: Sound production and sound quality. There is a proper way to make a good sound on a triangle and tambourine. The triangle has to resonate and it cannot be choked. You must produce a sound with a lot of overtones. Regarding tambourine, I tell band directors they need to supply their players with a good tambourine that has a head. You can't use a crescent-shaped rock tambourine to play classical literature. I couldn't do it so they shouldn't expect their students to do it. It would be like using a saxophone to play a clarinet part.

RPM: What sized drumsticks should students use in elementary, middle, and high schools?

NG: When I first learned, I used a large stick (2S or 2B). Young players have small hands and they need a bigger stick to learn control. Plus, it helps to have the added weight to develop the muscles. When players start to become more proficient in middle school, I recommend the Silverfox SD1 or SD2.

RPM: What do you recommend to the high school players who have added responsibilities in marching band and jazz band?

NG: The most important thing is that when they are playing drumset they can't use a concert or marching stick. I hear jazz bands where the players are playing too heavy. They should use nothing bigger than a 5A. I think the best size to use for jazz is 7A.

RPM: Do you prefer wood or nylon tip in jazz?

NG: Either one - it is personal taste. Nylon tip is good for cymbal definition. 🎵

Interview by Scott Snow

Visit Neil Grover's Web Site at www.groverpro.com

Visit Silver Fox Drumsticks at: www.silverfoxpercussion.com

REVIEW

Tao Te Drum: Eastern Drumming for the Western Drummer
by Daveed Korup (video with workbook)

Daveed Korup's new video and workbook, "Tao Te Drum" is a cleverly-constructed program that may cause you to rethink your philosophies about drumming. Daveed explains he was very much inspired by reading Ancient Chinese Philosopher Lao Tzu's book, "Tao Te Ching." The most helpful element of this program is the way the video works together with the workbook/journal. Daveed demonstrates the basic strokes and sounds on the dumbek. I especially liked how he only discussed three sounds: dum, kah, and tek. Dum and tek are played with the Primary Hand, while the kah is played with the Secondary Hand. With these simple strokes, Daveed guides us through warm-ups and over twenty authentic rhythms from Eastern Traditions. Daveed always speaks the rhythms first then performs them on the drum.

The biggest surprise of the video was when Daveed expressed his background in rudimental drumming. He drew comparisons between the sounds of a marching snare drummer and a great dumbek player. Daveed demonstrated impressive examples of paradiddles, paradiddle-diddles, and other rudiments on the hand drum.

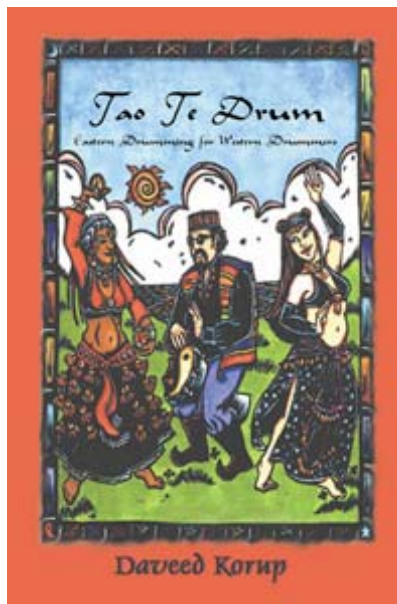
The video features fascinating excerpts of belly dancers and a solo violin, accompanied by a small group of drummers.

Drummers responded to other drummers, dancers responded to other dancers, and dancers responded to instrumentalists. My favorite part was learning ethnic rhythms from countries like North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, Turkey, Persia, and Central Asia. Daveed demonstrated relatively simple patterns for the following rhythms: Maqsum, Beladi, Mas-moodi, Ayub, Ghawazee, Bolero, Malfoof, Turkish 5/4, Persian 6/8, Moroccan 6/8, and Samai 10/8.

Mr. Korup's, "Tao Te Drum," just may rekindle a sense of magic in your own practicing and will certainly provide an inviting open door to the world of Middle Eastern Music. 🎵

Please visit Daveed Korup at www.drumfest.com.

Review written by Scott Snow



Daveed Korup

PERCUSSIVE NEWS

- ◇ This year's Day of Percussion at Umass, Amherst was another great success. Presenters included: Scott Snow, Colin McNutt, Steve Wilkes, Jonathan Haas, Bob Becker, Tony Cintron / Luisito Quintero / Damon Grant, Umass Percussion Ensemble, Umass Marimba Ensemble.
- ◇ Also, we had a great Day of Percussion at Berklee College in Boston on April 5, 2003.
- ◇ Ziljian is presenting its 380th Anniversary at Berklee College on September 13, 2003. The event is a benefit which will honor Tony Williams by establishing a scholarship in his name.
- ◇ Our neighbors, PAS Connecticut had a very successful Day of Percussion on April 5, 2003. The following artists presented: Dom Famularo, Dr. Nick Petrella, Mike Portnoy, Johnny Rabb, and Liam Teague.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS:

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University of Massachusetts Music Dept. - www.umass.edu/music/

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