
PIPING, DRUMMING AND HIGHLAND DANCING JOURNAL

How to Achieve Success in Teaching Drumming

By JAMES CATHERWOOD, Edinburgh

Mr Catherwood, whose name is well-known in drumming circles throughout the British Isles, is a Past President of the Lothians and Borders Pipe Band Association, a member of the Scottish Pipe Band Association Executive Committee, a Principal of the Pipe Band College, a teacher of drumming, and leading side-drummer of the Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band.

A GOOD DRUMMER does not necessarily make a good teacher. Teaching is an art not easily acquired, and methods are individual and dependent on temperament. Nevertheless there are certain basic principles which have proved their worth and, if followed, will produce results. In presenting my own interpretation of teaching method, I trust that the points explained will be of some assistance to teachers and pupils alike.

A teacher should firstly cast his mind back to the time when he was a pupil and the burning question in mind always was "*How long will it take me to learn?*" You all know the answers. Enthusiasm, perseverance, and practice limit the time to reach perfection. No teacher can make a pupil a drummer. He can merely guide and demonstrate and hope that his advice is understood and practised.

It is a good plan to begin a course with a special lecture on practice, impressing on the pupils that in the field of endeavour nothing can be gained without paying the price and the price here is practice. Again, practice spells should be of short duration but often. To drum for hours and lay the sticks away for days not only destroys the value of the instruction but dulls the keenness of the learner. Not until the elementary rudiments and one or two simple beatings are mastered should the practice periods be lengthened.

It should again be impressed on the pupils that the "long roll" cannot be mastered in a week or two, although of course in some classes will be found the outstanding exception. Here again the role of the good instructor is important as such exceptions should not be paraded to the class as the result of his teaching. Such method is more likely to retard those who are probably normal pupils and will learn in the average time. About two months is the time which elapses before pupils are able to play simple beatings from scratch.

After the "long roll" is well under way the teacher should demonstrate to his charges why this or that rudiment has to be mastered by playing over to them beatings in which the particular rudiment is used. This holds the interest and simplifies the step-by-step elementary stage on to the simpler beatings. By this time, of course, the teacher will have sized up his class. He will have mentally segregated the wheat from the tares'. This is the point where the successful demonstrator scores. He should set exercises to one part of the class, choosing a good pupil as leader, and leave them to practice while he concentrates on the backward unit. By this method not only will confidence be gained by the better pupils but the poorer ones will realise that they are not being left to fend for themselves.

Although learning drumming is not like taking a dose of pills, the teacher is nevertheless somewhat of a doctor who prescribes exercises to eradicate weaknesses, and these exercises must be taken over and over again to produce results. Sometimes there is found the pupil who, although obviously is able to understand and carry out the instructions, is not making the expected progress. Here again the approach of the teacher is important. In one such case I found that the boy concerned, in addition to taking his drumming class, was also studying signalling for his King's Badge in the BB. I

knew that he was also keen on painting and drawing and, along with his normal school home lessons, one was bound to suffer. I suggested that he meantime give up either signalling or drumming and concentrate on one at a time. Needless to say, like the average boy, he gave up the signalling (for the time being) and the improvement in his drumming was marked from that moment. He later took up the signalling and is now outstanding in both spheres of interest.

The moral is to know the pupils, their little domestic troubles, their temperamental lapses, (to say nothing of the teacher's) and their limitations. Patience and tactful understanding of the temperament of each pupil is a practical necessity in the instructor. The teacher who loses his temper easily, and I have seen and experienced the type of fellow who throws sticks about the room, is most unlikely to get good results from the material at his disposal. I remember a drum major in a juvenile band who used to flick the boys across the fingers with the stick for not picking up the lesson quickly enough to suit him, and on one occasion threw a drum at the boys. You can imagine the disrespect in which this man was held by the pupils and the utter disregard he himself had for the instrument he was teaching.

It may seem, so far, that I have repeated myself on occasions. That may be so, but repetition is the order of the day in drumming instruction. This may be the reason why so many outstanding instrumentalists cannot be bothered teaching pupils - they have not got the patience. Success is the reward of patience, of perseverance, of practice and of repetition. I, therefore, make no apology for repeating myself.

Now we come to the qualifications necessary for teaching a competing unit. The teacher must be up-to-date. One might as well be out of the world as out of fashion, and this indeed applies to a drum corps at a contest for major honours. The only way to be up-to-date is to recognise new developments in styles when they appear. The drummer with fixed ideas, with the inflexible mind, may be suitable for teaching rudiments but of little use for the high-grade competing corps. The leading stroke should encourage suggestions from his advanced drummers on questions of rhythm and style as this engenders a feeling of real use and assistance in the corps, and encourages enterprise and progress.

I have knowledge of two well-known drum corps where suggestions from the double-forte drummers were never entertained, not because the suggestions were worthless but because the leading strokes were inflexible and afraid of being shown up by being unable to play really advanced beatings. The talent of the corps should always be used to the advantage and progress of that corps, and the results of such co-operation have been proved on the contest field. Egoism in teaching and leading is fatal and damps enthusiasm apart from fostering contempt by the pupils and drummers. The leader must be in a position, however, to explain to his understudies the reason why their suggestions are impracticable, by way of demonstration, but he should never dismiss them entirely.

In the competing pipe band, co-operation between the pipe-major and the drums is the deciding factor in ultimate success. No unit can ever succeed in these days if the pipe-major fails to appreciate the value of the drum settings or expects his leading drummer to improvise beatings at short notice. There must be trial and error, practice and practice again, a complete knowledge of each other's capabilities and limitations and, most important of all, the realisation that pipes and drums together make the band not being incidental to each other but necessary, each in itself, for the success of the whole. The pooling of ideas among the drummers and among the pipers and drummers is the ideal at which all should aim. This has been proved repeatedly in the leading bands in the country. So long as the leaders are respected and their decisions taken as final and binding, disharmony can be eliminated. The secret, as I mentioned at the beginning of this short article, is enthusiasm and perseverance.

In conclusion, let me say a word which is worth its weight in gold to drummers - teachers and learners. A simple phrase well played is far better than an intricate passage roughly executed, or beyond the technique of the corps if played as a unit. Remember, quality and variety cannot be appreciated and judged accordingly if the setting is badly executed. I have long experience in drumming not only as a competitor but as a teacher, and in the three "Rs", so ably described in the article in this Journal by the eminent Drum Major Seton, Dunoon. I would add for the guidance of pupils and all drummers the three "Ps" - Patience, Perseverance and PRACTICE!

I wish you all success.

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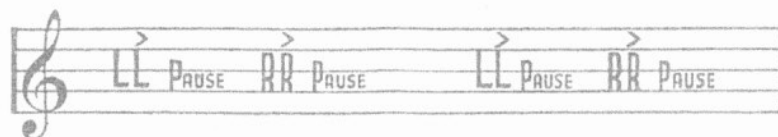
Arm Movement, Stick Control and Ensemble

By GEORGE PRYDE

George Pryde of Easthouses, Dalkeith, leading side drummer of Edinburgh Special Constabulary Pipe Band, and a mine-worker by trade, has recently won for himself a leading place in drumming circles. He ranks as one of the finest individualists in the country and has won numerous trophies. In addition he has trained several winning drummers, both juvenile and advanced.

DRUMMING is very interesting to most people and the reason is plain enough as the drum is the oldest percussion instrument in the world. Some people have a more acute sense of rhythm than others, and it is to those who play the drum but who are not advanced enough to read or write drum-music that this little article is written.

The Long Roll or 'Daddie-Mammie' Roll, as it is more popularly known, is definitely the most essential roll in military or pipe band drumming. I would like, therefore, to begin with a few words on this rudiment. The usual way to practise the Long Roll is to start beating L, L - R, R very slowly at first, gradually increasing the beats until a good steady roll is obtained. Now, somewhere in between the opening and closing of the roll something very important happens. At first, in the open stage, each beat has to have an arm movement of its own, but in the close stages there is only one arm movement to each two beats. I find when teaching the Long Roll that the pupil gets the open stage easily, up to a certain speed, then jumps or fumbles into the closed version. This is the point where the mistake is made. He is actually avoiding the most important part - the change in the arm movement. After a little thought I tried an exercise which, although unorthodox, really helps to cut out the fumble. If there are any drum students who experience the same difficulty while practising the Long Roll, I suggest the following exercise:



First a light stroke with the left followed very quickly by a heavy stroke with the left; a little pause, a light stroke with the right followed very quickly by a heavy stroke with the right. When practising this exercise the sticks must be raised to the proper positions, i.e. drop the left arm to play the light stroke and before you raise the arm again follow up very closely with the heavy stroke, thus using the wrist a little more for the second beat than for the first. Then a little pause and during that pause bring the left stick back to its original position. The procedure is the same with the other stick. After having mastered this exercise by speeding it up, gradually cut out the pause, and I feel sure that if done seriously it will go a long way towards improving the Long Roll.

Now to Stick Control. There is no easy way or quick method towards acquiring Stick Control. It is the result of careful study and regular conscientious practice. When I say practice, I do not mean just hammering away at a rhythm or beating until it is off by heart. It calls for deep thought and analysis of each rhythm in its turn. Get right down to the rhythmic skeleton. Exploit it and who knows but you may develop something just as attractive or even more so. Half an hour of study in this way is worth two hours and more of tedious practice. I myself have found that one hour of practical study every day at the same time has much better results than three or four hours practice every three or four days. Regular practice is essential. Another point - use a regular practice pad. Not only is it easier on the drumsticks but also on the ears of people less enthusiastic about drumming than the executant.

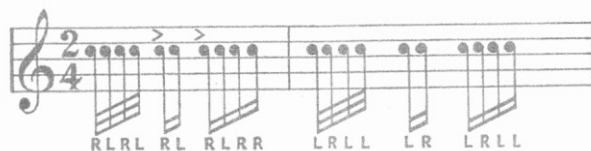
The Single-Stroke Roll is one of the most fascinating and effective beats played on the snare drum. Short, single stroke rolls played properly by a full corps of drummers have a tremendous effect, provided of course they are used in good taste and not stuck in anywhere. There is a drawback. The Single-Stroke Roll is one of the most difficult rolls to execute, especially when playing on the march. Do not get discouraged, however, as it can be mastered with patience, and some advice in how to master it will I am sure overcome the difficulty. Here is one of the most popular short rolls - the Five Single-Stroke Roll. Start very slowly and the important thing is to try keeping the sticks at the same height on the rebound. This, combined with an equal weight on each stick, will give a good clean even roll.



When confidence is gained, try speeding it up, but should mistakes crop up stop and begin very slowly again. After it is under control at a moderate speed try this little exercise with it:



When you are playing it to your satisfaction, follow it with this other exercise which runs the Five Single-Stroke Roll on to the Double Paradiddle.



It is very important that the accents be watched.

Finally, a few notes on Ensemble. There are two different types of drummers in the Pipe Band world; first, the drummer who plays rhythms without regard to the pipers; and second, the drummer who tries to fit his drumming to the music. The former is a drummer and that is all. The latter is a drummer but is also a musician. I began to study pipe tunes seriously only recently, and when I think about some of the drum scores used it puzzles me how the pipers kept on the tune when drum

rhythms, entirely out of order, were being played. This is something which must and will be rectified. Drumming does not have to be intricate to fit in with the music. Simple rhythms sound very attractive if they are in the right place and give the proper lift to the pipe music.

In conclusion, I trust that this little article will be helpful to the somewhat backward drummers. If so, I shall be more than satisfied, and it will be a pleasure to enlarge or clarify any points for the benefit of all.