Report by Greg Jansen, Churchill Fellow

2017 Churchill Fellowship to learn advanced snare drum techniques from leading educators in order to teach Northern Territory students

Awarded by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
To learn advanced snare drum techniques from leading educators in order to teach Northern Territory students

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Signed: Greg Jansen  
Date: 25th April 2019
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia for the opportunity to undertake this experience of a lifetime.

During my trip I met some fantastic educators, many of whom I have followed my entire career, and I would like to thank them for sharing their time and knowledge with me.

Sincere thanks to Northern Territory Division of ASME (Australian Society for Music Education) for their continued support of music education in the NT, and to my colleagues at the NT Music School, especially Simon Pedder, Wanita McNeill and Bill Grose, for their ongoing support and encouragement.

I would also like to thank my teachers Jim Piesse and Graham Morgan for the inspiration and guidance over the years and to Domonic Motto and David Quested for sharing their knowledge, support and friendship.

Thankyou to my mother, Judy, and father, Dr Guy Jansen, a 1976 NZ Churchill Fellow, for filling my childhood with music. A huge thankyou to The Kiver family for their support and logistical help while in the US. Finally I would like to thank my wife Jennifer, who’s organisational skills meant that the trip went off without a hitch, and my son Oliver, who allowed me to share this amazing experience with him, and who proudly told everyone that “we” got a Churchill Fellowship.

INTRODUCTION

I have studied at Music Conservatoriums in both Wellington, NZ, and in Brisbane, obtaining a Bachelor of Music (Jazz Performance) from Queensland Conservatorium, and a Graduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning from Charles Darwin University. I have been a performer and teacher of drum set and percussion for nearly 30 years, teaching all levels from beginner to university level. I am currently the Specialist Percussion teacher for the Northern Territory, at the Northern Territory Music School (NTMS), part of the NT Education Department.
During my years at music conservatoriums learning jazz drum set, the focus was more playing the notes, rather than the technique used. It was only much later in my playing career that I started to discover and seek out more information on technique. Since being introduced to the Level System, I’ve used it in both my playing and teaching, and found it to be an absolutely foundational part of both. I believed that the Level System needed to be taught within Australia because the alternatives for accenting techniques are very few. Despite this, the Level System does not seem to be widely taught in Australia, so I was keen to find out more about it and ask renowned educators about their views on the Level System, or alternatives.

For the last six years I have been running a drumline ensemble at the Northern Territory Music School as I felt that it was a good way to consolidate technique and rudiments and to improve students’ playing on the drum set. However, there are some schools of thought that say that a drumline technique background can actually be a hindrance to developing drum set playing and I also wanted to explore this further.

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**KEYWORDS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Aim
My aim was to investigate the different snare drum techniques, in particular the Level System, and where educators see them fitting into a student’s development, and for percussionists and drum set players as tools for musical expression.

Intended Audience
This report is intended to provide information for drum set and snare drum educators, suiting those teaching from Middle School to University.

Highlights
- While I gained a lot from each and every educator I met with, the chance to learn from Ed Soph and Gary Chaffee, educators I had followed for over 30 years, was the opportunity of a lifetime.
- The chance to have a listening session with Paul Wertico, where we discussed his musical influences was insightful and inspiring, as his music was a significant influence on me as a teenager.
- The opportunity to hear music at a venue steeped in such jazz history as the Village Vanguard was made even more profound by hearing and seeing up close, one of my favourite drummers of all time, Brian Blade.
**Major Lessons**

- The Level System provides a great technique base, from which to develop other more advanced techniques required to execute more complex repertoire.

- Bill Bachman’s teaching philosophy of “earned progression” through the material he uses, has directly influenced how I structure curriculum and lessons for both my students and for my own learning.

- Ultimately, technique is a means of obtaining a desired sound or tone, and this should be the guiding factor in determining which technique to use at any given time. Therefore, having a wide range of techniques at your disposal, provides a wider vocabulary of sound and tone, to be available to express yourself musically.

**Dissemination**

- In an educational setting I have begun to, and will continue to integrate the information learned on this trip, for students in my current role as Specialist Percussion Teacher at the NTMS.

- Plan to run workshops for instrumental teaching staff across the NT through the NTMS.

- Plan to run a teacher mentoring workshop at the Festival of Teaching, to be held in Darwin in August 2019.

- Plan to submit an article based on this report to ASME for their newsletter or publications.
## ITINERARY

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<td>24-26/1/19</td>
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INTRODUCTION

“You only play the drum kit as well as you play snare drum”, Ed Soph.

During my years at music conservatoriums learning jazz drum set, the focus was more on what I played, rather than the technique used. Also I seemed to be taught hand technique by classical snare drum teachers rather than drum set players. It was only much later in my playing career that I started to discover and seek out more information on drum set hand technique.

When the Level System was first taught it to me by my teacher Jim Piesse, it opened up a large vocabulary of drum repertoire, facility and ideas that I previously couldn't access. Since then, I’ve used the Level System in my own playing and found it to be an absolutely foundational part of my development as a musician. I have also used it in my teaching, and it has been a wonderful base for my students, where they finally ‘get that sound’ that is on many of the recordings they admire and they notice their skill level improve. I believed that the Level System needed to be taught within Australia because the alternatives for accenting techniques are very few. Despite this, the Level System does not seem to be widely taught in Australia, so I was keen to find out more about it.

When planning the itinerary for this Churchill Fellowship trip, one of the questions I wanted to ask all the educators were their views on the Level System, and about any alternative techniques they prefer.

I was also interested in the work of Gordy Knudtson, who’s Open/Close Technique was introduced to me over ten years ago by my teacher at the time, Graham Morgan. I felt that over this time I had some questions regarding aspects of the Open/Close Technique that I hoped to get answers to.

In teaching percussion and drum set there are different schools of thought regarding grips and hand technique. I wanted to explore whether there is a ‘one stop’ solution or does a student need to be taught a range of techniques providing options for their playing.
For the last six years I have been running a drumline ensemble at the Northern Territory Music School as I felt that it was a good way to consolidate technique and rudiments and to improve students’ playing on the drum set. However, there are some schools of thought that say that a drumline technique background can actually be a hindrance to developing drum set playing and I wanted to explore this further.

**PROJECT DISCUSSION**

**Los Angeles, California 1st – 11th December 2018**

While in LA, I had the chance to see alto saxophonist and composer Steve Coleman perform with his ensemble ‘Steve Coleman and Five Elements’ at the live jazz club Blue Whale in the heart of Little Tokyo. This was incredible, hearing Steve Coleman set up patterns, having the group turn the pattern into a cycle and then having each member of the group solo on that cycle. Within the complex improvised pieces there was a constant musical pressure and tension within the group, the bassist cycled a succession of notes with the melody pushing on top of his bass riff. The solos included a great deal of tension, until Coleman would re-state the original riff and the group would return to playing the original cycle.

A beautiful day in LA
I returned to the Blue Whale on another night to see Anthony Wilson with the LA studio legend Jay Bellerose on Drums. Jay Bellerose has performed with Robert Plant, Alison Krauss, Elton John, Ricky Lee Jones and Bonnie Raitt among many others. Bellerose’s drumming is elegant, highly musical and contains an inventive collection of percussion instruments in his setup. With vintage drums, items placed on top others to create unique sounds and shakers strapped to his ankles, his interaction and improvisation skills with the other musicians was sublime. A true Los Angeles musical treat if there ever was one.

**Bruce Becker**

*Bruce Becker was a long time student of the late Freddie Gruber, to whom many of the world’s greatest drummers have turned to perfect their individual techniques.*

*Bruce Becker offers some of the most comprehensive insights into the teachings of Freddie Gruber.*

I made my way to San Fernando Valley to have my first session of the Churchill Fellowship with Bruce Becker. Bruce has been teaching since 1982 and had over eight years with the late Freddie Gruber, often acting as his personal assistance, organizing his travel plans and watching a long line of well-known drummers booking in for lessons with Freddie. Bruce believed that over that time he saw a great amount of redundancy in the techniques of the great players coming to study with Freddie, and spent time with him discussing many of the inadequate technical foundations of professional drummers and the motion concepts which all great players share.

Bruce and I talked a great deal about the different stages of development in stick technique, starting with a French grip bounce stroke, which is the most open and free way to feel the rebound of the stick bouncing pivot/movement from the first finger on the practice pad. While Bruce believes the French grip offers everybody the ability to feel the stick as a separate entity, the fingers need to be reconditioned to be more responsive to the stick in this position, and the outcome aim was to create a dense stroke and a good quality of tone. There are actually four different grips: French, German, Traditional and American, and
Bruce teaches them all. Bruce has a system of steps for introducing the different grips with first introducing the French grip because he feels it’s the best way to feel the most free rebound off the stick. Bruce believed the hand positions were all the same and the same shape of the hand was desired in each one, and he was able to demonstrate for me a natural shaped hand consistently throughout all the grips.

**Clayton Cameron**

*Clayton Cameron currently teaches at UCLA, but has had a career spanning almost four decades. He has pioneered new techniques and perfected the art of brush technique, earning him the nickname “the Brush Master”. He held the position of drummer in the Sammy Davis Jr band from 1982 to 1990, and has also performed with many great artists including Frank Sinatra, Billie Joel, Sting, Mariah Carey, James Taylor, K.D. Lang, Elvis Costello, and Ricky Martin. Clayton has recorded 13 albums with Tony Bennett, and wrote THE book on the art of brush technique, entitled ‘Brushworks’.*

The importance of knowledge about the history of drumming and lineage of well-known early musicians was stressed to me throughout my time as a student at music Conservatoriums, and Clayton has a strong sense of paying homage to our drumming forefathers. We had a wonderful discussion about drumline, drum corps and the history of marching drumming and jazz.

The main reason I wanted to meet Clayton was his reputation as a master with the brushes and his ground-breaking work in furthering the art of brush playing. Clayton tells me that he developed his brush playing “out of fear” after he was told in a rehearsal that he should really take brushes more seriously. Clayton certainly has done that, being seen today as a leading authority on brush technique.

Clayton mentioned that the problem with most brush books is that the notes never match the sound, for example, you see a quarter note, but it’s not what you hear. Clayton however, believes that the way you create rhythm with brushes is
that you change direction, therefore each note head will involve a direction change. There are three direction changes with brushes: an away-from-you motion, a back-towards-you motion, and a sideways motion.

In order to achieve this direction change, there are three types of sweeps that Clayton teaches:

1. Staccato Sweep; brush comes off the drum.
2. The Legato Sweep; brush stays on the drum without lifting.
3. The Clasping Sweep; using your fingers on the brush you pull or flick it in.

Clayton believes drummers should utilise the 17 different rudiments referenced in his book, in their brush playing. By doing these ‘plug ins’ the drummer has some set patterns available to play in any situation. He believes the Level System (also known as the Stone System) is something that everyone, including his UCLA students, should learn as it helps students to control their volume. Clayton said that he teaches the Level System from the book *Patterns*, by Gary Chaffee, whom I had a lesson with in Boston.
Dallas, Texas 11th - 14th December 2018

Bill Bachman

Bill Bachman a specialist in hand technique with a substantial career in rudimental drumming and composing for drumlines. Bill is a graduate of Berklee College of Music and studied percussion performance at the University of North Texas. He has performed and instructed with a large number of award-winning marching percussion groups involved in the Drum Corps International (DCI), the governing body for junior drum and bugle corp competitions throughout the United States. Bill has a website called Drumworkout.com which has over a hundred hours of video drumming content, and regularly writes for Modern Drummer magazine.

I was interested in talking with Bill about his involvement in the DCI competitions and finding more out about how drumline programs work in the US. Bill mentioned that students in Texas start instrumental lessons in fourth grade, similar to what we do in the NT, and while drumline is normally offered only in high schools, occasionally there's a modified program in middle schools 6, 7 and 8 (Junior High). In most schools, drum lessons happen outside of school, but in a number of successful programs in select schools, the students have lessons in school. While often the DCI competition performances act as half time shows for American Football games, there are also indoor shows that are solely music and have a number of high school bands competing.

Over the years I've seen a number of drummers both in the jazz and rock genres, including Cindy Blackman (Lenny Kravitz), Travis Barker (Blink 182), Keith Carlock and Kendrick Scott, mention that early drumming in drum corps or drumlines was an advantage to their development as a player, and I asked Bill his thoughts on this idea. While he thought that the old stigma of drumline or rudimental players being fairly “stiff” on the kit is gone now, he did feel that many of them are initially missing the “whipping tool” that is the Moeller Technique, but by introducing this approach their drum set playing can be improved. Following on from this I asked why the Moeller Technique is not seen very often in drumlines. Bill felt that in actual fact, the best drumlines in the
world actually use Moeller exercises. However, students often never earn their way to the point where the Moeller would be introduced due to factors such as time restrictions to get competition ready etc., and therefore a lot of rudiments are difficult because they don’t know how to use Moeller. Many rudiments can’t be achieved using just the Level System, as they require more than just taps and upstroke.

What was a revelation to me was Bill felt that finger control needs to be taught before the Moeller Technique, because the fingers are used at the same time as the Moeller, particularly when playing single hand patterns of fours, as by the fourth stroke you are fatiguing. I have since applied this to my playing and that found it works extremely well.

I played on the practice pad for Bill and he quickly had an idea on where I was and what was missing in my playing. He seemed to have a very clear idea on what order a student should learn certain drum techniques, and that students “need to earn” progressing to an advanced technique by mastering the basic technique first.

Regarding different grips, Bill teaches students of all levels that step one is the Free Stroke (Full Stroke), and all of his students use American grip.
“It’s always back to fundamentals. But the free stroke is the most important thing you can do”.

One of the major benefits that I noticed straight away from having this session with Bill was to understand the benefits of a creating a fulcrum (or as Bill puts it “the ceiling on the stick, under which the stick pivots”) with the first finger. Bill demonstrated how to execute finer or softer playing using the index finger to pull up the stick. I didn’t have this in my ‘tool box’ before this lesson, but Bill really showed me how the first finger works as a trigger and using this to articulate any combination of low, light, fast or finesse notes.
The second concept Bill showed me was the role of the thumb, using a technique that he called the ‘Gandalf Thumb’. In this technique, the thumb does two things. The first is to push down to keep the stick in a low position. The second is to help execute control and play finer details on the instrument. Bill uses the infamous “You Shall Not Pass!” line uttered by Gandalf in The Lord of the Rings, as a fun and easy visual cue for the role of the thumb acting as a roof on the stick, making low strokes easier to play. I was surprised at how quickly this technique changed my playing, and was excited to realise how effective this be could for my students’ hands back home.

It was interesting to hear that Bill absolutely dislikes the German Grip, where the thumb is on the side of the drumstick. Bill favours American grip, which he feels has many more benefits, including ability to use the fingers in a much larger range of motion, and the ability to use the thumb to apply downward pressure on the stick. Bill feels that essentially, all drumming technique can be classified into two different categories:

1. Wrist Turn: the bead of the stick is the first thing to move. In most cases, wrist turn is aided by fingers and forearms.
2. Whip: in its purest form the wrist is ‘turned off’. This is called the Moeller Technique.

I finished by asking Bill, in what ways he thought percussion teaching has changed over the last 30 years? He responded that while there was no shortage of information available now on the internet, he believes there remains a shortage of information regarding how to apply that information to make it work and achieve the desired effect.

Kennan Wylie

Kennan Wylie is a Percussion Instructor at Marcus High School in Denton, Texas. There he coordinates the marching percussion program along with the concert percussion ensembles. Under his direction, the Marcus H.S group has received national acclaim both on and off the field, including ten national championship titles at the P.A.S.I.C Marching Competition. Kennan is a performer, clinician and
adjudicator across the US. He is the author of the book ‘Simple Steps to Successful Beginning Percussion’, which provides a step-by-step process to develop the beginning percussionist’s technical and rhythmic abilities.

When I had my session with Bill Bachman we discussed my middle school drumline ensemble back in Darwin, and while we are nowhere near the scale of American drumlines, the NT Music School’s untuned percussion ensemble manages to perform at end of the year concerts and be involved in some major events in the NT. Bill suggested I speak to Kennan Wiley, a leading high school drumline director at Marcus High School. He passed on my phone number and I made contact with Kennan that afternoon. It was very fortunate that Kennan lived in Denton, a town I was travelling to the following day and he kindly fitted me into his busy schedule.

While I see my NT students for one 30 minute group lesson and one 30 minute ensemble rehearsal each week, Kennan sees his students once a day for 45 minutes, five days a week. As Kennan said “You can do a lot of damage when you see those kids an hour every day of the week”. Many middle schools in the US do not have drumlines, and Kennan doesn’t think that middle school students are developed enough technically to play marching drums and to make them sound good. However, by the end of a student’s third year learning from Kennan they make the transition into the high school drumline where it seems to get fairly serious, fairly quickly. Kennan mentions that drumline is based on technique but also on reading notation as well. Students have to achieve a level of technique that will allow them to play Open Rolls and other required snare drum rudiments, but also that teaching students to read and to drum at the same time is very important. While Kennan’s books seem great for training hands, they are not just technique development books, they are reading development books as well.

Kennan also works with beginner percussion students and I was impressed with the resources he used, particularly his self-published books Simple Steps to Successful Snare Drumming and the Simple Steps to Successful Beginning
Percussion, which also features mallet percussion. According to Kennan, most of the school percussion programs in Texas use his books. Kennan believes in not progressing too quickly, with the first nine chapters built on basic reading and getting the students working on their single strokes and evenness of their sound. Despite this ‘slow progression’ design, in their first year Marcus High School students work through Kennan's complete snare drum book, due to the high number of contact hours. I realised that my students in the NT would need to complete a new chapter every four weeks to make it fit with his pace. While Kennan’s beginner students begin playing accents (Down Strokes) after six months, I tell Kennan that my students start at the start of their third year of playing! Kennan and I talk about my untuned percussion ensemble at the NT Music School and he offered me some advice for finding music for same-pitched bass drums and a number of snare drums. He suggested:

- Composing snare drum street cadences or street beats.
- Taking a solo from his resources, or classic rudimental solos.
- Some fantastic websites that have free Cadences for snare drum and bass drum only.
- Using modified rudimental solos with me writing added bass drum parts.

**Ed Soph**

*Ed Soph was Professor in Jazz Studies and Performance Divisions of the College of Music, University of North Texas from 1979- 2017. The University North Texas was the first public institution to teach jazz drum set, and Ed Soph was the first tenured track position drum set specialist in a public university. He is an international author, master teacher and musician, and was inducted into the Percussion Arts Society Hall of Fame in 2016.*

I have followed Ed Soph's career for over 30 years and have bought many, if not all of his educational resources that he has released over that time. Ed doesn’t believe in teaching online, only in person. Teaching to Ed has always been about personal contact and personal relationships and people seek him out the world over to study with him for good reason. Over the years Ed has taught two of my
favorite drummers: Keith Carlock and Ari Hoenig. At the Modern Drummer Festival in 2005, Keith said that Ed changed the way he played and that coming from a drumline background with a tighter sound, Ed’s teachings completely opened up everything for him. Keith was talking about the move called Rebound Catch which Ed subsequently taught me and which absolutely changed the way I have since thought of accenting. This concept was further consolidated by the teachings of John Ramsay in Boston and Kendrick Scott in New York.

The Rebound Catch is made up of two moves; a Moeller Stroke throw and a second rebound bounce that is caught by the fingers and hand. This absolutely made total sense to me after witnessing Keith Carlock use this as an essential part of his playing in a masterclass years ago in Melbourne. The tighter Down Stroke of the Level System still fits well in a lot of different musical situations but it can become awkward playing at faster tempos. I believe the Rebound Catch move could be achieved without the first Moeller throw but the more open sounding, less restricted Rebound Catch gives another option when playing accents. Ed commented towards the end of the lesson on how well my Rebound Catch was sounding and he was pleased to see how it started making changes in my ability to accent.

Ed Soph demonstrating Rebound Catch, Dec 2018
I asked Ed about drumming for drumline and how he converts drumline player’s hands to the challenges of playing jazz drum set. Ed replied “drumline hands or restricted stroke hands can be used on the drum kit too, for certain things. A lot of snare drum material and pedagogy is based on military and it doesn’t swing, it marches”. Ed found that the Rebound Catch works well for loosening up this repertoire.

Ed teaches what he calls a Neutral Grip, which he describes as being similar to holding a violin bow. The stick is suspended in the hand, and that suspension also produces the sound. Ed mentioned something I’ve heard him say in many of his resources over the years; “Control comes from degrees of looseness, not tightness”. It’s interesting to note that Bruce Becker (in LA) also talked about a “natural grip” and I have heard this discussed as an important technique building block and have been taught this from a number of educators over the years. 

Ari Hoenig was at the opposite end of the spectrum to Keith Carlock when he began learning from Ed, possessing an extremely loose technique. Ed instructed him to keep the looseness, but showed him the Level System, which offered Ari a lot of low level technique options that he could utilise.

During my session, Ed mentions some wonderful insights on teaching over the last 40 years.

- “My job as a teacher is to, if a student comes in with one way of playing, it’s to show them the complete opposite of that playing. It’s that damn simple, it’s ridiculous. Technique is just like vocabulary”.
- “The job of the teacher is to make a student see their potential”.
- “Everybody should be able to get to the point where they can express themselves musically on this instrument”.
- “Technique is continually modified as the person has more musical challenges and experiences. The point is to have a foundation that allows you to make those modifications. Having a Technique base to explore other techniques”.

Greg Jansen 2017 Churchill Fellowship Report
Ed’s basis for his book *Musical Time*, which I’ve worked from for many years, is that percussion is the instrument of motion. Motion can take the form of different tempos, dynamics, different coordination and combinations based on a style and sound. Ed’s teachings on motion and movement are well documented and after I played for him on one of the two beautiful drum sets in his teaching studio, he said to me “I knew you were going to be fine from the first note you played, because you moved in time to the music, which was appropriate to the tempo”. I’ve always admired his body of work both in education and music performance. The experience of spending time with Ed was quite incredible, an absolute dream come true over 30 years in the making.

**Minneapolis, Minnesota, 14th – 16th December 2018**

**Gordy Knudtson**

*Gordy Knudtson is the Head of Percussion at McNally Smith College in St. Paul, Minnesota. His books and video on ‘The Open/Close Technique’ developed this technique with nomenclature and helps develop an understanding of the underlying relationships of different rudiments.*
The legendary Graham Morgan, whom I’m proud to have had as my teacher and mentor while living in Melbourne, introduced me to Gordy Knudtson’s Open/Close Technique over ten years ago. At that time I ordered Gordy’s two books and his instructional video online and when the resources arrived, put time and energy into practicing his system and watching the video repeatedly. I found at this time there were some questions I had regarding aspects of the Open/Close Technique that the material couldn’t answer, and during my session with Gordy on a freezing afternoon in Minneapolis, I was able to address these.

The Open/Close Technique is a small, low volume snare drum technique that breaks a double stroke into two separate movements; an open stroke (wrist down) and a closed stroke (wrist up). Gordy and I broke down these movements very slowly and I started to understand and feel where the second note of the double could be when using this technique. Gordy had me apply hand and wrist movements on the ‘Open’ as well as the ‘Close’, which felt like they locked me into the timing and movement of the technique, making the technique almost play itself. Although both the Open/Close Technique and the Moeller Technique are both ways of creating accents, they achieve this in quite different ways. The Moeller Technique has the movement of the wrist lifting up first, whereas the Open/Close Technique is the reverse, having the movement of the wrist moving down first.

Gordy mentioned we have two options when using accented and non-accented notes in that students can choose between the Moeller Technique or Open/Close. I believe the Open/Close allows for faster playing and by following Gordy’s detailed instructions, my Open/Close Technique improved significantly by the end of our session. I also had a long list of ways to practice and improve this technique over time, which was extremely satisfying and worth the trip up to icy Minneapolis.

I ask Gordy about his views on the Level System, and whether every percussionist should have it as a basic foundation in their playing? Although he believes there is merit to it and feels it makes a difference in percussionist being
able to control dynamics, Gordy uses a little twist on the Level System that he called ‘Soft Up Stroke and Down Stroke Rim Shots’:

- **Down Stroke Rim Shot** - Stroke starts high and travels down towards the pad ending low, squeezing of all the fingers on the way down to produce an accent.

- **The Soft Up Stroke** - stick travels up as it’s being squeezed, producing an accent.

This extra technique was quite unexpected but it added another piece of the puzzle for me that could be incorporated into my Level System type playing techniques. Like the option between using Moeller or Open/Close, I was excited that all of these techniques could be incorporated into my own practice routine and subsequently my own playing and that of my students.

**Chicago, Illinois 16th – 18th December 2018**

In Chicago, I was keen to hear music at the famous jazz club *The Green Mill*, a club frequented by Al Capone in his day, but there was a private party on one night and it was closed on the other, so unfortunately this didn’t happen. However, I took a short, freezing walk through downtown Chicago to the Winter’s Jazz Club to hear the ‘Dana Hall Trio’. Dana Hall is a drummer, educator, and ethnomusicologist and serves as the Director of Jazz Studies at DePaul University. He and his polished ensemble performed some tasteful standards from the Jazz, Brazilian, and American Songbooks, including works by Billy Strayhorn, Gilberto Gil, Edward ‘Duke’ Ellington and Thelonious Monk.

On my last night in Chicago I visited Andy's Jazz Club to hear the ‘Eric Schneider Quartet’. Eric had stint with the legendary jazz pianist Earl Hines and was a member of the Count Basie Orchestra, during which time he performed with Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Goodman, Sarah Vaughan, Tony Bennett and Sammy Davis Jr. I enjoyed the ensemble and the venue, feeling inspired by the lesson with Paul Wertico earlier that day, reflecting on the listening session in his Grammy decorated lounge room.
Paul Wertico

Paul Wertico is Associate Professor of Jazz Studies at the Chicago College of Performing Arts, Roosevelt University. As member of the Pat Metheny Group for 18 years, he won seven Grammy Awards over this time. The Cape Breton International Drum Festival honoured him with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his “Major Contribution to the World of Drumming and Education”. In my teenage years I bought all of The Pat Metheny Group’s albums and have followed Paul’s career for over thirty years.

I had a wonderful Uber ride up to Paul’s house on a clear, still and sunny Chicago day. Two weeks later the weather changed in the upper states, with a polar vortex, freezing parts of Lake Michigan and creating major interruptions for the city.

Paul Wertico got straight into it by saying that the reason we’re doing this (playing music) in the first place is to express ourselves. Paul teaches his students all the different grips (French, German, American, and Traditional), and the different methods of Moeller, Murray Spivack, and Henry Adler. Paul explains that they all sound different, so he teaches students how you can utilise all of them depending on which grip you use and the velocity or the angle of attack. However, Paul mentioned that if a student is doing something differently to how he shows them, he won’t make a change unless he knows it’s going to lead to problems further along. A number of main points were raised during our session:

- In all grips, the stick should be like a clave and able to resonate to make sure the student is not absorbing the shock of the stick and hurting themselves.
- Angle of attack of the stick is important to consider. The straight line is going to give you a hammer sound, if you sweep to the right the pitch is going to go up, if you sweep left the pitch is going to go down.
- Fingers are faster than your wrist. Your wrist is faster than your arms.
• Choice of technique or method depends on the style of music you’re playing. You don’t want to play a heavy metal gig with your fingers because you will “blow them out”.

• Paul still does wrist building exercises everyday on the practice pad using large, heavy brass drumsticks, but also likes to have his students strengthen the fingers.

• “The harder you hit an instrument the pitch does go up. So I’m not thinking dynamics, I’m thinking pitch”.

Paul will show students all the ‘angles’ and ask them to play a phrase (a rudiment) on the snare drum. He’ll then ask the student to include some phrasing utilising the angle of attack. “All of a sudden it’s a melodic phrase, not a rhythm any more” Paul said. In regards to drumline, Paul feels that drumline technique for drum set players is useful if you are playing progressive rock or jazz fusion. Paul said “You’re hitting everything directly down, and evenly with the same tone, if that’s what you’re going for musically that’s fine”.

I ask Paul a little about his career. He said that he thinks of the ‘ECM’ record label sound as being like “even eighth note bebop”. Paul was an ECM drummer before there was ECM. Back in the early ‘70s Paul was in a band called ‘Ear Wax Control’, a totally improvised avant-garde group. He showed me photos which looked like an interesting kit set up back in 1978; totally different every time, made up with pots and pans, loose bits of metal and cake tins. He played ‘sheets of sound’ type drum solos and had 17-year-old vintage drum heads on his drum set. He believes that technology has changed everything in music in that sound engineers can now fix anything in recordings. “You don’t have to be an expert any more. What is an emotion if a performer can’t finish playing it? It just turns into sound sculpture”.
We finish my session with Paul by moving upstairs to his lounge room, and listening to lots of fantastic jazz records featuring many of Paul’s and my favorite drummers, including Roy Haynes, Tony Williams and Jack DeJohnette. Under the gaze of his seven Grammys, he offered truly unique insights and it was an inspiring experience, one that I will always remember.

**Boston, Massachusetts 18th – 22nd December 2018**

**John Ramsay**

*John Ramsay is the author of the books ‘Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers’ and ‘The Drummer’s Vocabulary as Taught by Allan Dawson’. John has been a Professor at Berklee College of Music for 36 years, and studied with Allan Dawson for over ten years. John is considered the authority on Allan Dawson, who helped establish the drum department at Berklee College of Music and taught the who’s who of drummers in his 18 year tenure at the college.*

For many years Allan Dawson taught from his home in Lexington, a suburb of Boston. After Allan passed away John bought the house, which also contains a studio in the basement, and continues to live in the house to this day. Many famous drummers have honed their craft in that basement studio, including a
young Tony Williams (member of the famous ‘Miles Davis Quintet’). I wanted to ask John a lot about Allan Dawson and his teaching, and also about the setup of the Berklee College of Music and music education in the US in general. Berklee music school has an enormous reputation globally and John believes schools such as Berklee are keeping jazz alive. Berklee has six main principle percussion instrument streams:

- Drum set
- Marimba.
- Vibraphone.
- Orchestral or Concert Percussion.
- Hand percussion or Afro Cuban percussion.
- Steel Pans.

In the first Semester at Berklee, percussion students are required to learn the 26 rudiments, in part arising from John’s position within the college. John says that he tries to include the rudimental snare drumming aspect along with the classical aspect of snare drumming, “so the drum set guys know the difference”. The Orchestral percussion students at Berklee are required to take a class in drum set, along with some hand drumming classes, as they believe there is a need for students to play hand drums in Chamber Orchestras and smaller ensembles.

John said high school music programs in the US are quite different to college programs, in that middle schools feeder programs often offer hand drumming, drum set and orchestral percussion, and John feels that it’s hard for students to spread themselves over all those areas. Music education majors are required to take a semester each of woodwinds, brass, and percussion (mainly timpani and mallets). Often in high school there is a drum set specialist that comes in to teach, although not so much in middle school, and certainly not in elementary (primary) school. Often students get into the drum set stream in high school by joining a big band or a jazz ensemble, and there is then a direct line of enrollment for these drum set players into music degrees such as at Berklee. While the Rudiments are taught as early as semester one at Berklee, John mentions that a
lot of new students need to work on their reading notation, so this also becomes a focus.

Regarding technique, John said Allan would talk about technique as like being related to a four speed gears, standard shift:

1. First gear - The wrist is firm and there is no rebound per say.
2. Second gear - wrist stroke but slightly opening and letting a little rebound occur.
3. Third gear - having a larger opening and having more finger bounce and rebound, maybe there’s a little wrist but it’s moving down into the finger area.
4. Fourth gear - all fingers.

John also studied with Ed Soph after Allan Dawson, and so teaches his students Ed’s Rebound Catch technique, but also thinks that the Level System is something every percussionist should learn.

John Ramsay in his studio, Dec 2018
I asked John about Allan’s famous ‘Rudimental Ritual’, a 13-page daily rudimental practice routine that is required to be memorized. It’s used by a large number of great drummers, such as Terri Lyne Carrington, to keep their hands in shape. John explained that Allan’s exercises were always based on a musical objective and his lessons were by design 50% technique and 50% music. Allan would give the student three rudiments per week, the way they’re laid out now in John’s book (*The Drummer’s Complete Vocabulary as taught by Allan Dawson*, which contains the ‘Rudimental Ritual’). The sound was considered the important thing rather than the speed, as Allan thought the speed would come later. I asked how long it would take students to learn all the rudiments? John said that he had a lesson with Allan every second week and it took him two years to learn the entire Rudimental Ritual.

**Gary Chaffee**

*Gary Chaffee is the ex-Chairman of the Percussion Department at the Berklee College of Music. Hundreds of successful drummers came out of his “school” of drumming. Gary’s four ‘Patterns’ series books changed the way drummers thought about stickings, offering limitless possibilities and applying them to the drum set.*

I have been in awe of Gary Chaffee’s teaching for years. With over fifty years of teaching he has been an incredible influence on modern drum set players such as Vinnie Colaiuta, JR Robinson, David Garibaldi and Jonathan Mover among many others. I come to Gary’s home straight from my morning session with John Ramsay, and after Gary asking many questions and taking plenty of notes about my musical history we get down to talking about hand technique.

Gary asks the question “what is technique for?” His view is that ‘technique’ is a means to an end and hence there is no reason to showcase technique in itself. He goes on to say “If you showcase the music then everyone who’s a trained musician will know that you’ve got great technique and everyone who isn’t a trained musician will know you play really great music that’s all that we’re really interested in”. He also states “If there was a ‘best way’ of playing the drums, we would have worked it out by now. We’re still debating all of this, we’ve been
playing the drums for a couple of hundred years”. When working with students Gary gives them exercises to do and then sees what success they have. If the student has difficulty achieving them, and Gary can attribute it to a problem with their technique, then he may take a look at it. Gary thinks stressing too much on how you want students to do stuff rather than what you want them to do, leads to poorer outcomes, particularly for younger students.

Gary and I talk about the purpose of the Rudiments. Gary said their purpose is to be able to play rudimental snare drum pieces, but that most of the older drum set players, like himself, learnt the rudiments and tried to figure out things to do with them on the drum set. However, Gary believes ‘stickings’ are much bigger than that though, and hence his system of stickings, as covered in his Patterns books, are specifically designed for drum set players. ‘Stickings’, according to Gary, are just set patterns of single strokes and double strokes in various combinations, in sequences. They can be played in any rhythm and Gary demonstrated a number of examples for me using a wide range of rhythms. We then worked on some sticking examples in non-matching rhythms, and also linear patterns (playing patterns on the drum set one surface at a time). Using the linear patterns with the sticking patterns is the purpose of Gary’s materials, as it gives drummers a lot of different options across the drum set.

During my session with Gary, I discover a wide range of innovative ideas to add to my drum vocabulary. Many of Gary’s concepts are explained in his books and resources but for Gary to take the time and give me examples that were relevant to me and to explain his concepts so clearly for me was a great honour. I’ve heard ex-students say that he teaches creatively and I believed I witnessed that in this session. He tailored the lesson to absolutely suit me, improvised parts of the lesson from seeing my responses to the previous material. Gary is truly a master musician and educator. This was one of the lessons during this trip that I was a little nervous about prior, but one I will always be grateful for.
Marko Marcinko

Marko Marcinko is Adjunct Professor in Jazz Studies at Pennsylvania State University, PA. Marko has toured the world and recorded with the high-profile Maynard Ferguson’s Big Bop Nouveau Band and has performed with many international acts. Marko has studied with Joe Morello (drummer for Dave Brubeck of ‘Take Five’ fame) and Freddie Gruber.

As soon as I meet Marko I see he has a sharp sense of humor and he seems to be a bit of storyteller. He tells me that from where he lives in Pennsylvania it’s an easy hop over to Washington DC, Philadelphia or New York City, and Marko shares a number of stories over the next two hours about growing up as a young musician being so close to those centres of musical excellence.

Freddie Gruber taught Marko that it didn’t matter which grip you use and it didn’t matter where the fulcrum was. Marko said that you want your stroke to go straight up and down, with no slicing coming off the head, very much how a golfer tries to not slice the ball off the tee. We talked a lot about when as an 18
year old, once a month Marko would drive for two hours to up state New York to have lessons with the legendary Joe Morello, studying from the George Lawrence Stone book *Stick Control*.

We also discussed teaching beginning percussion students and the importance of subdivision practice as an integral part in their education. We discussed drumline and Marko believes that Drum Corp is closer to classical percussion than to the drum set. He said that in his experience, a lot of the ex-drumline students move into the concert percussion stream at College rather than the drum set stream.

As Marko is a talented big band drummer we discussed the pool of players that someone like Maynard Ferguson has to choose from in the US. Marko tells me “You have to be a good small group player and a good orchestrator as a drummer in a big band because you’re the whole thing. You’re everything”. We proceeded to play through a big band chart and improvise together with him on the piano and me on the drum set. Marko had kind words to say about my playing and said I should travel to teach and study at Penn State College in the future.

**Washington, DC 26th – 29th December 2018**

I first heard of the jazz club Blues Alley from the Wynton Marsalis Quartet’s album *Live at Blues Alley*. Eva Cassidy also recorded there and Dizzy Gillespie was quoted as saying “now THIS is a jazz club” when he first came to play here. It’s everything you want your jazz club to be; in the old part of town in the heart of Georgetown, down a stone lined alley, it’s an old 18th century red brick carriage house but with a huge space inside. It was packed inside to see the pianist Cyrus Chestnut and his trio. Chestnut had a mixed set of jazz standards with a touch of gospel repertoire thrown in. The kitchen boosts an authentic Creole cuisine, and I had two marvellous cups of gumbo, and enjoyed the trio.
Jeff W Johnson

Jeff W Johnson was a student of Joe Morello and author of ‘The Level System’. His book is a condensed view of the teachings of Joe Morello and the late George Lawrence Stone (author of ‘Stick Control’, and elected to the Percussion Arts Society of Fame as one of the most influential drum teachers of all time).

I first learnt the Level System from my teacher and mentor Jim Piesse in Sydney. The system uncovered a way for me to utilise the height of the sticks to create dynamics. I have used Jeff’s book The Level System, with my students in the NT ever since and was looking forward to meeting its author. Jeff resides in Richmond, Virginia, about two hours outside of Washington. The area is steeped in Civil war history, and hence has a rich Fife and Drum history. It was fitting then that Jeff and I talk about drumline, and Jeff mentioned that modern drumline is quite different compared to even 25 years ago. While the development of highly tight, tunable kevlar heads means it’s easier for students to play, however because they’re so hard, there is more stress on hands and hence more likelihood of injury. Jeff believes there is a very different playing style used on drumline drums, one that needs to be softened down a lot for use on the drum set.

Jeff believes that if you don’t have The Level System you don’t have anything in regards to dynamics. George L Stone, who developed the Level System (Stone

The Blues Alley Jazz club, Washington, Dec 2018
System) technique, used to teach more than one rebound stroke within the system. However, according to Jeff, Joe Morello told him “You can confuse people by saying too much. The Full Stroke and Half Stroke are both rebound strokes, they’re just starting from a different place”. Therefore, Jeff uses these as synonymous terms and does not mention Half Strokes in his book *The Level System*. In the Level System there are four moves: Rebound (to a chosen height), The Tap Stroke, the Down Stroke, and the Up Stroke.

The Washington Monument, Dec 2018

**New York City, New York 2nd – 16th January 2019**

The Jazz Standard is a jazz club that was named by *New York* magazine as one of the top five jazz spots in 2018. I visited the Jazz Standard over two nights, seeing two quite different groups and styles of jazz. Bill Charlap’s trio with bassist Peter Washington and drummer Kenny Washington have been together for 20 years. Most of their material was from the classic American Songbook. Kenny Washington has a reputation of being one of the best drummers to have lessons with in New York. He has a strong rudimental technique and passes this
knowledge onto his students at Juilliard School and SUNY Purchase. Although I
didn’t have a chance to have a lesson with him while in New York, hearing him
play with the Bill Charlap trio was a delight.

There are three ‘Mingus Big Bands’ in New York that alternate to take turns
playing Monday nights at the Jazz Standard. The group that was playing on the
night I attended was, ‘The Mingus Orchestra’, which plays lesser known Mingus
tunes and features instruments not routinely seen in jazz ensembles, such as
bassoon, french horn, bass clarinet, acoustic guitar and flute. Back in the early
‘90s I used to enjoy listening to the Charles Mingus’ album *Black Saint and the
Sinner Lady*, which used the same instrumentation, and it was fantastic to hear
everyone solo in the big band, including bassoon, bass clarinet and french horn.
It was also a great opportunity to see trombonist Robin Eubanks featured, a
musician I’ve admired over the years.

NYC at night, Jan 2019
As part of the Winter Jazz Festival, I saw a triple bill at Le Poisson Rouge, (a venue which The New York Times dubbed “The coolest place to hear contemporary music”) featuring ‘Terri Lyne Carrington and Social Science’, ‘Terence Blanchard featuring the E-Collective’, and ‘The Bad Plus’. While all of the groups were incredible to hear at this standing only venue, Terri Lyne Carrington has always been a favourite drummer of mine so hearing her perform live was something I was very excited to have the opportunity to do while in New York.

![Terri Lyne Carrington in action with her ensemble ‘The Social Science’, Jan 2019](image)

Apparently the drapes in the Village Vanguard haven’t been changed in around 40 years, but this basement club is the stuff of legend. Many giants of jazz, including Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins and Bill Evans, have all walked down the Vanguard stairs to perform and record at the club. Edward Simon, Scott Colley and Brian Blade perform as ‘Steel House’ and I attended over two nights and both sets each night. I believe Brian Blade is one of the most creative and dynamic jazz drummers in the music scene at the moment and I was lucky enough to be just seated just a metre away from him and the stage. Attending both nights was brilliant, with a great deal of musical tension and inspiring musical dialogue within the trio, it was great to be able to hear and compare both nights. The Vanguard has a lot of incredible history, the room sounds just like it does on the recordings, and hearing a favourite musician of mine, Brian Blade, perform two nights in a row was a true highlight of the trip.
On my last night in New York I returned to the Village Vanguard to see bassist Ron Carter play in a trio setting, in the venue he has performed and recorded in many times over the last 60 years. Mr Carter was a member of the ‘Miles Davis Quintet’ in the mid-1960s, and has also performed with Freddie Hubbard, Lee Morgan, McCoy Tyner, Horace Silver and many others legends of jazz. On one of the nights I was at the venue seeing 'Steel House' play, a bar staff member mentioned that the last seat at the back of the bar was an excellent spot to hear the music, due to the unique funnel shape of the club, and it was a great privilege to spend my last night in New York, in that seat at the Village Vanguard listening to one of the giants of the jazz world.
The Appel Room in Lincoln Center, with its view of the Manhattan skyline, 2019 Jazz Congress

**The 2019 Jazz Congress**

Under the leadership of Managing and Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis, and hosted at the Lincoln Center in New York City, this annual conference brings together artists, educators, media and industry leaders in the global jazz community. For many years I have viewed the world-renowned Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra via the internet but I was excited to see that the larger Keynote sessions from the Jazz Congress were in the lovely concert space the ‘Appel Room’, with its amazing views of Central Park and the Manhattan skyline. In attendance at the Jazz Congress was a Who’s Who of jazz performance. All of the workshops and panels I attended were highly informative and thoroughly enjoyable.

Panels and Workshops attended:

• University as Jazz Training Ground: A panel of musician educators talk about how universities have become a critical training ground for jazz artists.

• Jazz Education Online: Leaders in online jazz education share their views.

• Keynote Session. Art Blakey Centennial Celebration: Members of Art Blakey’s band talk about being members of 'The Art Blakey Messengers'.

• Jazz Down Under. Spotlight on Australia: Australian jazz professionals discuss current state of jazz across Australia.

• Electric Miles Revisited: Members of Miles Davis ‘70's electric bands discuss the music of Miles Davis at that time.

• Alternative Jazz: Discussion for and about musicians who have expanded into other genres of music.

• Jazz in Troubled Times: Discussion about jazz in today's world.

• Copyright and Licensing-The Rules of the Open road: Basics of copyright law and licensing terms and concepts.

• What's that Sound- An Audio Recording Masterclass: Engineers share tricks of the trade.

A New Orleans 2nd Line procession signalling the end of the 2019 Jazz Congress
The Drummers Collective (part of The Collective School of Music)
This New York based music school has a wide range of world-class percussionist and drummers on the faculty and can provide access to lessons and practice rooms while in New York City. I visited the Drummers Collective during their open day and I spoke with Director Anthony Citrinite, and Associate Director Chris Juergensen about the Collective’s range of programs and study options for Australian students. I also took the opportunity to view teaching rooms and sat in on a masterclass hosted by drummer and teacher Tobias Ralph. It was a great chance to view the school first hand as I’ve heard so much about this school and it was a fantastic opportunity ask a wide range of questions of all the staff.

Washington Square, NYC, Jan 2019
Kendrick Scott

Kendrick Scott is a faculty member at the Manhattan School of Music. Named a “Rising Star” by Downbeat magazine and a “drummer whose time is now” by the New York Times, Kendrick is one of the most exciting drummers and teachers in New York right now.

When I first saw Kendrick perform at the Melbourne Jazz festival in 2017 backing singer Kurt Elling, I was impressed by how dynamic his playing was and how much control he displayed. He was a perfect drummer for backing a vocalist, but was also just as dynamic and musical in his own ensemble ‘Kendrick Scott Oracle’ and his many other projects. I took the ‘A’ train up to Harlem for a lesson and we got straight down to talk about the makings of a musical drummer.

Kendrick mentioned that he felt that one of his greatest assets was being a dynamic drummer, and hence developing drum techniques which relate to a wide range of dynamics and a good quality tone and sound production on the drum set is a strong focus in his own practice and when working with students. Kendrick places a lot of importance on developing his playing and that of others with ‘sound’ and ‘dynamics’ being the central focus, a theme he returned to numerous times over our session.

Kendrick discussed how the drum set could be thought of as an orchestra and introduced me to a wonderful exercise, which was in fact an exercise the legendary drummer Max Roach would give his students. It’s called ‘The Max Roach Dynamic Independence Exercise’, which involves considering each drum as a separate instrument. While it seemed very easy at first, to be able to play all the examples to the point where the instruments don’t flam together and the dynamic change is smooth and steady, is something I found extremely difficult. I find this exercise very musical and centering and one that I believe I can always improve on.

We then discussed accenting on the drum set. Kendrick states there are two types of accents: Closed accents (which are the Level System ‘Down Strokes’), and Open accents (which is a similar move to Ed Soph’s Rebound Catch).
Kendrick believes both the Open and Closed accents are important for providing options for your sound and tone, in that the Open Accent gives a more legato, full sound with a broad tone, whereas the Closed Accent is a staccato, tight sound with a muted tone. Kendrick feels that in his playing he uses predominantly Open Accents, resulting in a more open sound than a lot of other drum set players.

Incidentally I had seen the incredibly talented Kenny Washington play with Bill Charlap at the Jazz Standard the evening before, and thought at the time that he looked as if he was playing a lot of down strokes and playing ‘into’ the drum set, which resulted in a different sound to Kendrick’s playing. It was interesting to be then be able to reflect on the difference between these two fine players, and how a lot of the modern jazz drummers today use both open and closed accents, along with different fulcrums to affect the sound of modern jazz drum set performance.

With Kendrick Scott, Jan 2019
Orlando, Florida 16th – 24th January 2019

Danny Raymond

Danny Raymond has spent over 25 years of his professional career in the Orlando Disney theme parks as a performer, show director and audition facilitator. As an instructor he’s worked with high schools, senior corps, junior corps, and private students. Danny has spent time teaching and training drumline groups, Syracuse Brigadiers, Boston Crusaders, Carolina Gold, and most recently the Santa Clara Vanguard.

Upon hearing the news of my planned trip to the US, my past teacher and mentor Graham Morgan suggested I seek out Danny Raymond, of whom he had heard his old teacher, Joe Morello speak very highly. Enjoying the sunny Orlando day, a welcome change from the previous icy New York weather, I caught up with Danny at his teaching studio close to the Disney theme parks. We talked about his day job at the parks, performing with the ‘JAMMitors’ (a roaming drumming group) and how organizing performers and composing parts for buckets, rubbish bins, terracotta pots and cake tins is part of his weekly role.

The JAMMitors, a roving drumming group in the Disney Parks, Orlando (Danny Raymond not present), Jan 2019
Danny has been involved in teaching a large number of middle school percussion students over the years and gave me some wonderful material for working with this age group. One such piece is ‘Immigrant Jam’, based on the rhythms of Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song*, which is useful for a small drumming group (snare drums or 20 litre buckets). Danny also had some fun ideas for Back Sticking and other stick tricks for buckets or snares.

Danny’s father taught him drums from an early age and stressed the importance of practicing starting sticking patterns with either hand so you are able to flip a sticking pattern around to the non-leading hand. Danny gets students to play both hands at the same time on certain patterns as he believes the hands like to react the same way and your right hand will teach your left or weaker hand. Danny’s beginner students just work on coordination and reading, focusing on ‘whole notes’ and ‘half notes’, with Danny often getting the student to count out loud. An Intermediate student would then progress to work on accents while more advanced students work on solos he’s written based on *The Grid Book* series (a book that gives every permutation of a number of the drum rudiments). Danny believes that the Level System is something everybody needs to learn and feels that it is a great starting place, from where he can adjust it to Open/Closed or the Moeller techniques as desired.

In regards to developing material for drumlines, Danny believes that the following concepts should be considered: stick level, technique used, the desired sound, the rhythmic passage and the visual aspect. Typically, drumlines utilise the following techniques: the Level System, Open/Closed, Finger, and Wrist techniques, with the Moeller used mainly for visual impact.

Danny has a relaxed philosophy in regards to his teaching material and believes he is open to trying a wide range of techniques with his students and himself. Danny thinks we should try and incorporate as much technique as needed to express yourself and that the desired ‘sound’ should be the driving force for this. Danny wants his hands to be able to adapt to produce the sound he is after. Danny’s ‘try different things and see what works approach’, supports his view.
that we should learn and apply as much technique as you need to be able to express yourself on the drums, cymbals, a trash can, a pair of sticks on a pad or anything that is capable of making a good sound.

**Barry James**

Barry James’ career spans over 40 years as a nationally respected teacher. He is George Lawrence Stone’s (developer of the Stone System) last remaining student and teaches Mr Stone’s Stick Control Method. Barry, along with Joe Morello, wrote a book called ‘Drum Lessons with George Lawrence Stone’ that is considered a training guide and complete reference source to use with Stone’s book ‘Stick Control’.

I met Barry at his studio and he was pleased to hear about my travels and the list of teachers I’d already spent time with. He was the last teacher on my trip but one that I have been warmly anticipating since first planning my itinerary. We got straight into talking about his famed teacher George Lawrence Stone. Mr. Stone was a rudimental drummer and a mallet player, and his theory was that you can be a sculptor by virtue of owning a hammer and a chisel, but you don’t really sculpt anything until you have the technique to do it. In 1937 Bill Ludwig (Ludwig Drums) encouraged Stone to develop a resource from all of the single pages of exercises that Stone gave to his students during their lessons, despite none of them having written explanations describing how to play them. The resulting book, *Stick Control*, went on to become one of the most popular and cited drumming books of all time, and is the book Barry started studying with Stone in 1961. Barry tells me there was a sign on the wall at Stone’s teaching studio that said "The way to speed is slow deliberate continual practice". Barry tells me that Stone had a strong belief in those words and it’s the reason Stone had printed ‘repeat each exercise 20 times’ on every page of *Stick Control*.

Stone’s Method is essentially the same as the Level System but with much more detail, especially regarding stick heights. Stone’s method included Full Strokes, Half Strokes, Taps, Down Strokes and Up Strokes, but the Full strokes and Half strokes could be generated from many different heights, all of which Stone would
want his students to practice. Stone also had students practice what he called Throw/Pull (which elsewhere in this report is called Open/Close), which was a very advanced technique for that time. Barry tells me that progressing through Stick Control was a four year course and the next book from Stone (Accents and Rebounds) came along later when Joe Morello seemed to add accents to Stick Control, inspiring Stone to write a second book.

It was truly inspiring spending time with Barry and fascinating finding out elements of the Stone Method I wasn’t previously aware of. It has changed how I practice Stone’s books and how I use it with my students as a teaching resource. I am looking forward to uncovering some new ‘technique treasures’, which had previously been a mystery to me because there is so little instruction in Stone’s books. George Lawrence Stone was teaching some very advanced techniques for that time and Barry has gone a long way in kindly uncovering many of Stone’s techniques for me. I feel very privileged to have spent time with Barry and will find much inspiration from his session for many years to come.

Los Angeles, California 24th – 26th January 2019

The NAMM Show
The National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) was established in 1901. Over four days at the Anaheim Convention Centre, the NAMM Show offers music education networking opportunities and hosts numerous educational sessions.
There was a record-breaking attendance this year with 115,000 people attending and over 2,000 exhibiting companies representing more than 7,000 brands. I decided to first see all percussion equipment stalls in the morning and attend a number of the education sessions when they opened mid-morning. There were many percussion stalls showcasing recent developments in percussion equipment manufacturing, equipment to try out, older products that I hadn't seen in person, all the time chatting with sales reps and watching (and talking with a few) a number of well-known drummers mingling with company bosses, sales reps and the general public.

Although the education sessions I attended seemed to be aimed at more at private teaching studios, (such as using online marketing, and strategies for retaining students) the opportunity to compare Australian music teaching businesses with American ones was quite interesting, as I have worked in this arena.
CONCLUSION

While all of the educators I met with used the Level System as a foundation technique, they nearly all supplemented it in some way by using other techniques as well. Similarly, they found it useful for introducing students to technique, but then progressed them on to other techniques. Ed Soph teaches The Level System and described, “developing a technique base to explore other techniques”, while Bill Bachman was quite surprised by even the need to discuss using the Level System as a way of accenting, as he responded “well how else are you going to do it?”

The session with Barry James uncovered the mysteries of the teachings from George L Stone’s The Stone System (also called the Level System) for me, but it was also extremely insightful and useful to start to see the link being made between the teachings of Joe Morello, and the other forms of this material, from educators such as Jeff W Johnston (in his book The Level System) and Gordy Knudtson’s modified ‘Soft Up Stroke and Down Stroke Rim Shots’.

Over the course of talking to the 14 educators on this trip a resounding recurring theme emerged; that we shouldn’t study technique for technique’s sake, but rather view technique as being a means to obtain the desired sound from your instrument. When choosing which stick technique to use, the aim should be performing a personally satisfying sound, tone or effect you desire and allow these to be our guides for determining what the music we play requires. Kendrick Scott placed a lot of importance on ‘sound’ and ‘dynamics’ development as being a central focus in his teaching and personal playing. Danny Raymond talked about “aiming for the sound first and sound being the driving force for any technique he uses to express himself”, while Bill Bachman spoke about “how ‘tone’ and ‘sound’ should be a major factor in choosing the appropriate technique”. Paul Wertico stressed “The drum stick and our relationship with the pressure and looseness we have on them will determine our sound”.

In the past I hadn’t had much success with Moeller Technique but was able to use the modified technique for use in a small range of motion. I found that the
information from Bill Bachman, where he had me utilise a combination of fingers with the Moeller technique, has opened up this technique for me now with pleasing results.

Most educators also emphasised the need to work within all schools of technical methods, rather than relying on just one. In order to utilise different techniques in order to achieve the desired tone or sound, you must possess the ability to access them when needed. The benefit of working with technically challenging repertoire seemed to be a common theme from educators as well, allowing the player to gauge their success with any given technique. For example, snare drum pieces by Wilcoxon and the ‘Rudimental Ritual’ by Allan Dawson seem to ask a lot from any one of our chosen techniques, and will force us to ask questions of ourselves, such as “am I able to play these rudiments in a relaxed, comfortable way, at all dynamic levels and at all speeds?” Practicing repertoire like this provides instant feedback on whether you are using the most effective technique or need to modify it to comfortably play the given piece of music or exercise.

I believe the technique of using a back finger fulcrum produces a dry, dark and short tone, unlike the legato tone produced with the front fulcrum hand technique. I feel players such as Marcus Gilmore, Chris Dave, Eric Harland and Mark Guiliana all use this back fulcrum technique a great deal. While this creates a modern contemporary sound, it is still ideal to have the ability to change between techniques while playing and have both an open legato front of the hand tone and a dark dry staccato back of the hand tone at your disposal. In the past I feel I have had limited sound and tone creating options in my playing due to using only a few stick techniques. I am very much looking forward to working with many of these techniques I’ve learnt on this trip to engage a wider range of tools for creating sound and tone, and in the end creating greater pathways to express myself musically.

Ed Soph stated that “Percussion is the instrument of Motion” and all of the educators seemed to reinforce this strong link between movement and sound in
drumming. Bill Bachman talked about having fluid, relaxed mechanics, using natural motions and working with how the body wants to work.

“Everything we do is music and its art, so as much as we get into training that meticulously, with absolute anal retention and perfect 10,000 reps to train the body, it’s so you can then just have fun making music with a totally free mind”, Bill Bachman.

As this report is being written relatively soon after my trip, while I have already began to integrate some of the new information into my teaching, it's full value and potential, I feel is yet to be fully realised. I recorded nearly 40 hours of audio recording with the lessons alone, with very high levels of technical detail involved, and anticipate that I will be uncovering new information and discovering new things for a number of years to come.

Brian Blade's drum set at the Village Vanguard, Jan 2019
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Rebound Catch: John Ramsey, Kendrick Scott, Clayton Cameron and Ed Soph all teach a similar move. The Rebound Catch is made up of two moves; a Moeller Stroke throw (which also can be done without the Moeller and just started from a Full Stroke position) and a second rebound bounce that is caught by the fingers and hand. Also called Bounce Catch or Open Accent.

Stone System: also called Stick Control Method or The Stone Method, is a method developed by George Lawrence Stone.

The Level System: modified from the Stone System but the term is often used interchangeably. The Level System was a book authored by Jeff W Johnston in which the Stone System was simplified and condensed to exclude explaining some of the components from the Stone System.

Full Stroke: Also called the ‘Free Stroke’ or ‘Bounce Stroke’. Stick starts with tip facing the ceiling and returns to this position utilizing a full relaxed rebounded stroke.

Up Stroke: From a tap position the stick is played then raised to a full or half stroke position.

Down Stroke: Also called the Closed Accent. Starts with tip facing the ceiling and ends after striking the drum an inch from the drumhead.

Tap Stroke: Also can be referred to as ‘ghost notes’.

Open Accent: Legato accent, full sound with a broad tone.

Closed Accent: Staccato accent, tight sound with a muted tone.


Soft Up Stroke and Down Stroke Rim Shots: A Gordy Knudtson developed technique, using the snapping of the stick to create accents for both the up stroke and the down stroke.

Cut and divide approach: Having accented notes amongst unaccented notes.

Rudiments: Are like scales are to other instruments. There are 26 standard rudiments complied by the National Association of Rudimental Drummers (NARD) and 40 International Snare Drum Rudiments according to the Percussive Arts Society (P.A.S)
The Rudimental Ritual: by Alan Dawson is a set piece in which 86 Rudiments are played one after another nonstop.

German Grip: Thumbnail on the side of the stick, palm facing the floor.

French Grip: Thumbnail on the top of the stick facing the ceiling. Often used when playing the ride cymbal.

American Grip: Thumbnail between the German and French position.

Cadence: Up to thirty-six bars of music that can be repeated many times over.

The Jazz Standard set up for the Bill Charlap Trio, NYC, Jan 2019