

## Guidelines for Drumset Notation

By Norman Weinberg

**H**OW SHOULD ONE NOTATE music for the drumset? This seems a simple question, yet an examination of the published resource materials and performance literature reveals that composers, arrangers, editors, authors and educators often embrace different views on the subject. This article, based on my DMA dissertation, attempts to answer the question by surveying the published literature and forming a compendium of symbols and notational procedures currently employed for drumset notation.

By itself, a compendium of current notational practices does not completely answer the question. David Cope writes that: "The point is, what really needs to be done is not to keep listing the diverse ways each composer symbolized his music *or* create substantially new and negating *systems* of notation, but to concentrate on *codifying* one way for future composers to symbolize their music."<sup>1</sup>

Recent history offers two examples of attempts to codify a language. Esperanto was an effort to create an international spoken and written language that would be used by all the peoples of the earth. MIDI is a computer protocol that enables electronic musical instruments to communicate with other computer-based systems. Esperanto was a failure, MIDI a success. The success or failure of any codified system rests on the desire to adopt a standard without regard to special interests or personal views.

In an effort to avoid special interests, 20 reference works and 200 performance works were analyzed in this survey. Reference and performance materials were further divided into two categories: those employing precise notation, and those based on improvisatory frameworks. In an attempt to avoid bias, no composer, arranger, or author's material was represented in the survey more than twice.

These guidelines will not try to create a uniquely new notational system for the drumset. Instead, they present a

clarification and simplification (when required) of the notational systems already in use in the majority of analyzed works. I have chosen to follow the path of Frank McCarty, who wrote that the main goal of a standardized notation "is to strengthen the notational language between composers and performers by simplifying and clarifying its content and standardizing its applicability without, however, limiting its potential for expansion."<sup>2</sup>

I have avoided a discussion of the conventions of normal musical layout (stem direction, beaming rules, spacing tables, etc.), except when traditional, accepted practice is obviously at odds with the notation encountered during the analysis. I have also avoided working with notational systems that are purely "graphic" in concept. These unique notational systems are highly individual—fusing the notation to a specific work—and not a part of the notational system generally in use by the majority of composers and arrangers. These graphic systems are "too special and distinctive either to offer or require any standards at this time."<sup>3</sup>

This article is intended as a guideline for the composer, arranger, performer, educator and editor who may be looking for a notational system for the drumset that will be clear, concise and (hopefully) adopted by the drumming community. Only when the composer and performer understand the same language can true communication take place.

### THE NEED FOR A STANDARDIZED NOTATION

Hugo Cole writes: "The first purpose of a notation is to put over the message clearly and concisely."<sup>4</sup> While the purpose of using a musical notation may be obvious, the notation's meaning itself is not always so apparent. Kurt Stone writes: "Musical notation, after all, is not an ideal method of communication, utilizing, as it does, visual devices to express aural concepts. But it is all we have."<sup>5</sup>

All communication systems require convention, and musical notation is no exception. In order for communication to take place, the speaker must use a language familiar to the listener. Rastall assumes that the "composer and performer have a basic common understanding of what is implied by the notation."<sup>6</sup> Yet, this common understanding between composer and performer often breaks down, leaving the performer confused concerning the exact intent of the composer.

When discussing notational problems that create confusion for performers, Cole offers the following list of the eight most common causes of problematic notation:

**1. Graphical faults** (poor spacing and alignment, badly-formed symbols, unclear layout).

**2. Inconsistency** (contradictory markings, symbols used in different senses without good cause).

**3. Too little information given** (that is, too little for adequate performance under the prevailing conditions).

The most treacherous situation is of the generally consistent writer who abandons consistency. If, for instance, nearly all simultaneous notes are properly aligned, the few exceptions will be much more likely to mislead than if alignment was haphazard throughout.

**4. Too much information given** (that is, unnecessarily much under prevailing conditions).

**5. Meaningless precision.**

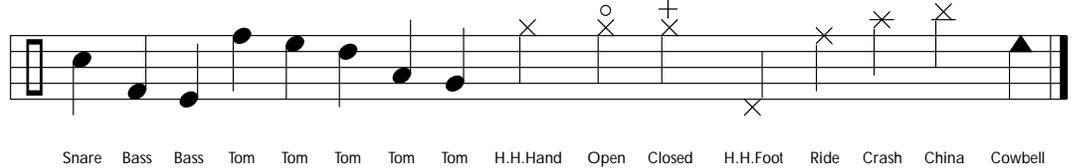
... but unnecessary instructions, such as fingerings for expert players or bowings on every note, are unnecessary in all conceivable contexts, and so unjustifiable. Excessive use of redundant and precautionary markings is also a symptom of overanxiety, and is to be deprecated.

**6. Uncertainty as to terms of contract** (degree of latitude to be taken in interpretation).

**7. Ambiguity** (where signs may have two meanings, only one of which can be correct).

## Guidelines for Drumset Notation

### Ex. 1. Key



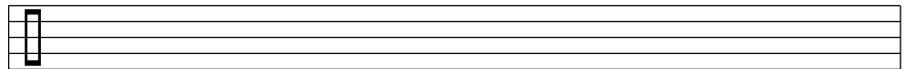
### 8. Insufficiency of notation for the job at hand.<sup>7</sup>

Percussion notation has its own unique set of problems in addition to those listed by Cole. As composers and arrangers invent signs, symbols and terminology, the percussionist is faced with learning a multitude of musical languages.

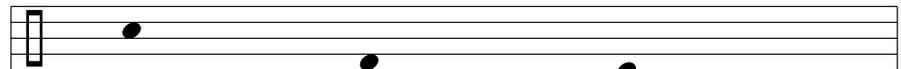
The dream of a standardized percussion notation has long been the wish of performers and composers. Yet the dream has not materialized. Over 25 years have passed since Frank McCarty's questionnaire on percussion notation was published by the Percussive Arts Society. The results of the questionnaire proved that 87% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "an international symbology should be adopted."<sup>8</sup> Donald Martino sums up the desire to clarify notation by saying "the need to clarify and standardize the existing symbols of our notation must surely be evident."<sup>9</sup>

Recently, there has been an explosion of drumset literature. An increase in the popularity of jazz, pop and rock music (all of which make strong use of the drumset) continues to produce more musicians who are interested in learning to play the drumset. These musicians are a potential market for publishers who produce books and materials for drumset instruction as well as written arrangements of recorded performances. The emergence of journals and popular magazines dedicated to a large extent toward drumset performance practices has produced additional exercises and transcriptions of recorded drumset performances. The increased influence of Latin, Caribbean, African and Indian music upon the commercial music scene has spawned a variety of "style" guides

### Ex. 2. The Staff and Clef for Drumset Notation



### Ex. 3. Snare Drum, Bass Drum One, and Bass Drum Two Staff Positions



for the drumset. The evolution of the home-publishing industry has made it possible for anyone with a new idea to publish a method book, arrangement, or musical composition.

In the present state of affairs, each method book, performance transcription, style study, magazine article or musical composition requires a new and individual solution to the problem of drumset notation, and drumset notation falls into further disarray.

#### THE GUIDELINES

Drumset performance can be divided into two distinct styles: precise and improvisational. Precise musical notation is essential for many drumset solos, percussion ensembles, method books and educational articles. Improvisational notation is indispensable for popular music. Since these two performance styles have distinct notational requirements, the guidelines will be divided into two parts. The first part will cover notational guidelines for precise performance notation. The second part will present guidelines for improvisational performance notation.

In arriving at the recommendations for the guidelines, the criteria for selection employed by the International Conference on New Music Notation was

constantly consulted. The Conference's criteria were:

1. Given a choice, the preferable notation is the one that is an extension of traditional notation.

2. The notation should lend itself to immediate recognition. This means it should be:

- a) graphically distinct;
- b) as self-explanatory as possible

3. Proposals should be made only in cases where a sufficient need is anticipated.

4. Analogous procedures in different instrumental families should be notated similarly.

5. Given a choice, the preferable notation is the one that has received relatively wide acceptance.

6. The notation should be sufficiently distinct graphically to permit a reasonable amount of distortion due to variations in handwriting and different writing implements.

7. The notation used should be the most efficient for the organizational principles that underlie the respective composition.

8. Given a choice, the preferable notation is the one that is spatially economical.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically applied to these guidelines, criteria 1 and 5 were interpreted

to mean that a preferable notation is one that is employed in a majority of the 220 publications examined for these guidelines. Criterion 2 (“graphically distinct”) specifies that signs and symbols should not contradict one another. In other words, each notation recommendation must represent a unique sign, a unique staff position, and/or a unique symbol. Criterion 3 suggests that recommendations not be made for performance techniques of a highly individual nature. And criterion 6 was expanded to include notational symbols that are common to computer-based music-notation software.

#### PRECISE NOTATION

**The Legend**—The legend (called a “notational key” or simply “key”) is a graphic explanation of the notational system used by the composer or arranger. These guidelines recommend the following concerning a notational key:

1. All compositions and charts should include a key.
2. The key should be given before any actual music is indicated in the work. The key may be presented during the introductory text in a method book, the first staff system in an improvisational-style chart, or above the music in an article included in a journal or magazine.
3. The key should include the staff positions for all instruments (written with their associated note heads), all articulation signs, all beater signs, and all additional notational graphic symbols used in the music.
4. All symbols, staff positions, note-head alterations, sticking, beaters, etc., must be strictly followed for the duration of the entire publication or section of the publication.
5. Do not include any notation signs or symbols in the music that are not defined in the key.
6. The only allowable addition to the music after the key is given, should be written text.

#### STAFF POSITIONS FOR DRUMS

These guidelines recommend that all drumset music be notated on the tradi-

tional five-line staff system. In addition, all drumset music should employ the “neutral clef” (also called the “percussion clef”) to indicate that staff position locations are not indicative of precise pitch.

#### Snare Drum and Bass Drums—

The snare drum should be written on the third space in the staff. This staff position was employed in over 86% of precisely notated performance literature, and in 97% of all improvisational charts included in the survey.

Works calling for a single bass drum should place this instrument on the first space of the staff. This location is used in nearly 70% of all precisely notated performance literature, and over 97% of all improvisational works. When a second bass drum is required, it should be scored on the first line of the staff. Over 57% of all precisely notated drumset literature that require a sec-

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ond bass drum place the instrument at this staff position.

**Tom-toms**—As shown by the results of this survey, the position of tom-toms on the staff varies widely depending on the number of toms required in the publication. For example, when precisely notated works call for only two tom-toms, the most common staff positions are the top space for the first tom-tom and the second space for the second tom-tom. But, when compositions require four tom-toms, the most common staff positions are the top space for the first tom-tom and the fourth line for the second tom. For this reason, these guidelines will not present recommendations for staff positions based on first tom, second tom or third tom. Instead, the recommendation will be based on the total number of tom-toms included in the composition (see Ex. 4).

### STAFF POSITIONS FOR CYMBALS

**Hi-hat**—The hi-hat cymbals played with the foot should be notated on the first space below the staff. This location represents a solid majority of surveyed performance literature.

The hi-hat cymbals played by the hand should be placed in the space above the top line of the staff. This location keeps the notation of hi-hat cymbals (either played by the hand or the foot) consistently on a space of the staff.

This location represents the first instance of having two instruments at the same staff position location, as the highest tom-tom in a set of seven toms also uses the first space above the staff. It is assumed that composers will rarely need to notate the highest of seven toms at the same time as a hi-hat cymbal played with the hand, but even if this is necessary, the cymbal's identification will be made clear with the use of an "X" note head. Example 6 illustrates how the hi-hat cymbal and the tom-tom can share staff locations.

**Ride and Crash Cymbals**—The ride cymbal should be placed on the top line of the staff. The crash cymbal should be placed on the first ledger line above the staff. By using this staff posi-

Ex. 4. Tom-tom Staff Positions—One to Ten Toms

tion for the crash cymbal, a logical consistency is achieved when a composition calls for the use of the three most common cymbals (this would include all of the surveyed works written in an improvisational notational style and all but a few works written in precise notation): hi-hat cymbals are notated on spaces of the staff and the hanging, or suspended cymbals, are notated on lines of the staff.

**Additional Cymbals**—If more cymbals are required for the performance, it would be logical to expand this system below and above the recommended staff positions. The top space of the staff should be reserved for a second set of hi-hat cymbals. While only two of the surveyed compositions call for a second set of hi-hats, their use is becoming more and more popular as drummers place an additional pair of hi-hats on

the right-hand side of the drumset. If this staff position is used, then all hi-hat cymbals will still be notated on the spaces of the staff, thus keeping a logical and consistent format.

The fourth line of the staff should be reserved for a second ride cymbal. Placing this instrument on the fourth line would again be consistent with the notion that ride cymbals are written on the upper lines of the staff.

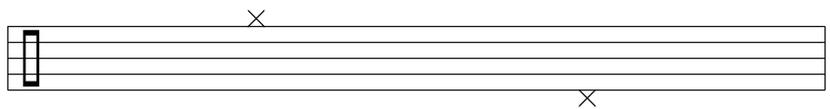
Additional crash cymbals should be placed above the first crash cymbal (starting at the space above the first ledger line above the staff). The exact cymbal types (China, splash, sizzle, swish, etc.) should be identified in the key of the composition. For the performer, the fact that a cymbal written at a certain staff location is a China cymbal or a splash cymbal is not relevant. Once the instrument is identified in the key, and the performer places the requested instrument at a convenient physical location for performance, the written identification of the cymbal type in the music is no longer necessary.

It is assumed that a composer or arranger will seldom need to notate cymbals above the second ledger line. With the system outlined above, seven cymbals can be placed on the staff (this represents the largest number of cymbals seen in the surveyed literature). Standard notation for cymbals will include two hi-hat cymbals, two ride cymbals, and three crash cymbals of various types. If more cymbals are required for performance, additional notes can be placed above the second ledger line, and continuing higher above the staff.

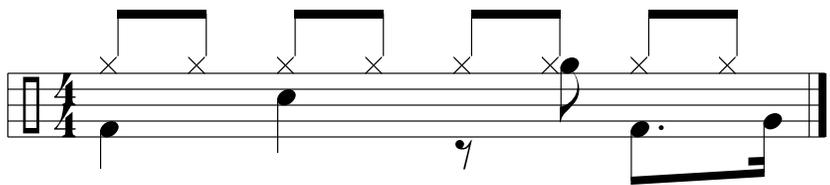
#### STAFF POSITIONS FOR ADDITIONAL INSTRUMENTS

The additional instrument most often scored in drumset music is the cowbell. With a total of 19 precisely notated compositions in the survey calling for the cowbell, a special, standardized cowbell notation is necessary. It is recommended that the cowbell be assigned to the top space in the staff. This will afford a unique staff position when the

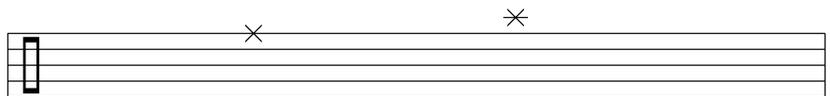
Ex. 5. Hi-hat Cymbals Staff Positions (Hands and Feet)



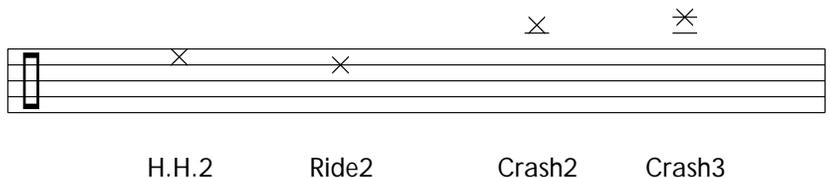
Ex. 6. Cymbal and Drum Sharing Same Staff Location



Ex. 7. Ride and Crash Cymbal Staff Positions

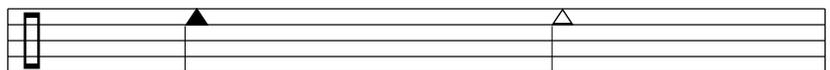


Ex. 8. Additional Cymbal Staff Positions



H.H.2      Ride2      Crash2      Crash3

Ex. 9. Cowbell Notation



cowbell is being played with the first hi-hat in a common performance style called "two-surface riding."

In addition, a unique note-head symbol must be employed so that the performer will be able to differentiate between the other instruments and the cowbell. It is recommended that the cowbell be written with a closed triangle note head. When rhythmic values exceed a quarter note, the triangle note head can be written open, thus indicating a longer durational value.

#### SPECIAL NOTE HEADS

**Cymbal Note Heads**—The results of this survey on drumset notation show that a large majority of composers and arrangers continue to employ the "X"-shaped note head for the notation of cymbals. In the surveyed drumset music written in precise notation, this note head is used to indicate all of the cymbals in 65 examples. Surveyed drumset charts written in an improvisational style display a similar affinity for the use of an "X" note head to indicate cym-

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bals. Of the surveyed charts, 69 use an “X” for all cymbal notes.

With this magnitude of frequency, “X”-shaped note head should continue to be used in drumset music. The fact remains that the “X” note head is the most popular (and most consistent) note-head alteration in current drumset literature.

These guidelines recommend that all cymbals (hi-hat, ride, crash, China, splash, etc.) be indicated with “X” note heads. In addition to following the general convention of the surveyed literature, the use of “X” note heads provides the composer or arranger with a method for placing both a drum and a cymbal at the same staff location.

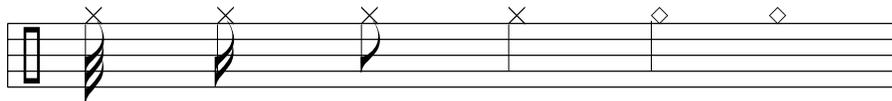
Due to the large number of improvisational charts that already employ this system, it is recommended that cymbal note values longer than a quarter note be written with diamond note heads. Stone recognizes this convention when he notes: “Cymbals— x-shaped note heads for black notes; open diamond-shaped note heads for half and whole notes.”<sup>11</sup>

**Ghost Strokes**—It is recommended that parenthetical note heads be used to indicate ghost strokes. With the exception of “X”-shaped note heads used to indicate cymbals, the most common altered note head found in the surveyed literature is one surrounded by parenthesis indicating a ghost stroke. Ghost strokes written as parenthetical notes allow the use of this performance technique on any type of instrument (drums, cymbals, cowbells, etc.).

**Rimshots**—In the works examined for these guidelines, five different note heads were defined as “rimshot” and 12 different note heads specified rimshot variations. These figures only represent the use of note heads to indicate rimshots. When articulations are used to indicate rimshots, 14 additional rimshots and rimshot variations are encountered. Obviously, drumset notation shouldn’t require 31 different notational procedures for a single effect.

Just as the notational symbol for ghost strokes can be applied to any in-

Ex. 10. Cymbal Note Heads



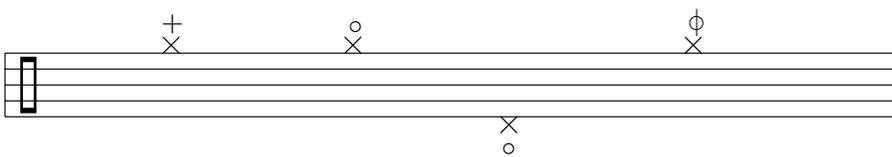
Ex. 11. Parenthetical Notes for Ghost Strokes



Ex. 12. Rimshot Notation



Ex. 13. Hi-hat Articulation Notations



strument of the drumset, a symbol for the basic rimshot must be able to indicate this performance technique on both the snare drum and the tom-toms. It is obvious that an “X”-shaped note head may cause confusion when a large number of drums or cymbals need to be placed on the staff, since an “X”-shaped note head indicating a rimshot would be indistinguishable from a note intended for a cymbal.

It is recommended that all rimshots be written as a normal note head surrounded by a circle. This conforms to the standards set forth by both Stone and Gardner Read’s *Notation: A Manual of Modern Practice*.

**Note Heads for Additional Instruments**—Composers of both precisely notated works and improvisational charts write for instruments (such as the cowbell, woodblock, gong or triangle) that are not always associated with the normal instruments in the drumset. When additional instru-

ments are notated in drumset music, they should use triangle-shaped note heads (either open or filled, depending on the durational value). Instructions for the use of additional instruments must be included in the key and strictly observed throughout the composition.

### ARTICULATIONS

**Hi-hat Articulations**—It is recommended that open hi-hat cymbals be written with an “X” note head and an open circle articulation mark. Closed hi-hat notes should use the articulation of the plus sign. These articulation signs and their associated meanings are approved by the International Conference on New Musical Notation, and recommended by both Stone and Brindle.<sup>12</sup>

It is further recommended that the articulation for closed hi-hat not be indicated unless the composer or arranger feels that it would clarify a particular passage. The inclusion of circle and plus signs above every note

would be cumbersome and clumsy. It should be assumed that all hi-hat notes are to be played on the closed hi-hat unless the articulation sign for open hi-hats is present.

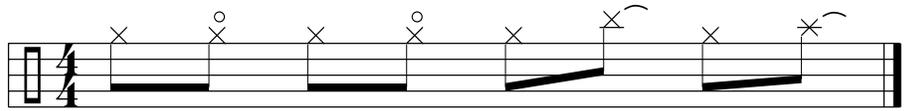
One of the main advantages of using the open circle for the open hi-hat is that this articulation works equally well for notes defined as a “foot splash.” This performance technique involves playing the hi-hat pedal with the foot in such a manner as to create a sound similar to a pair of small crash cymbals, rather than the tight “chick” sound normally associated with the hi-hat cymbals played with the foot. Similar to the articulation for the closed hi-hat with hand, the closed hi-hat with foot should be assumed unless this articulation sign is employed.

The symbol of an open circle bisected by a line should be used to indicate a half-open (or half-closed) hi-hat. While this performance technique is not as common as the stroke for fully open hi-hats, it does offer a higher degree of precision and musical nuance to both the composer and arranger.

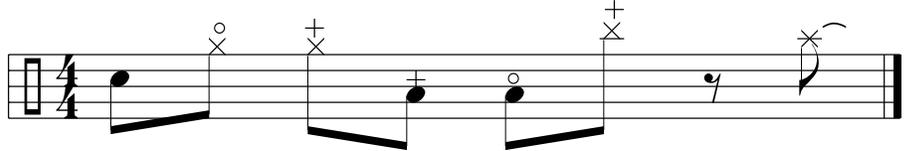
**Decay Symbols**—It should be assumed that all instruments of the drumset be allowed to ring for the entire length of their natural decay, and that the actual value of the intended durations be written in the music. It is recommended that composers and arrangers use the incomplete tie to indicate notes that are allowed to ring through their natural decay only if they feel that certain passages would benefit from additional clarification. Otherwise, no special articulation of durational value is required. Some of the surveyed compositions include the “L.V.” instruction along with an incomplete tie. This practice is redundant, as only one sign is necessary and generally sufficient to indicate the desired result.

Notes on any instrument that are to be performed in a manner where the natural vibrations are cut off should use the hi-hat articulations of an open circle and the plus sign for such purposes. As seen in the example below, this articulation can be applied

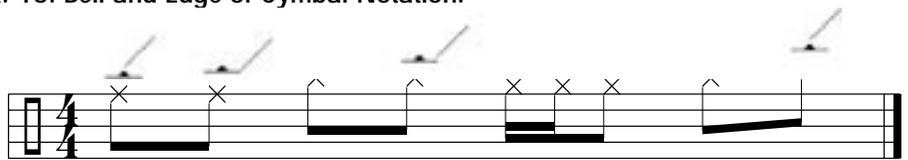
Ex. 14. Natural Decay Notation for Additional Clarity



Ex. 15. Unnatural Decay Notation—Cymbals and Drums



Ex. 16. Bell and Edge of Cymbal Notation.



Ex. 17. Center and Edge of Drum Notation.



to both drums and cymbals with clarity and precision.

**Surface-Area Indications**—Few works surveyed for these guidelines incorporate any type of surface-area specifications other than a written instruction to play on the bell of the cymbal. While surface-area designations are more common in works written for multiple-percussion than they are on the drumset, composers and arrangers may want to incorporate more accurate surface-area designations in the future.

It is generally agreed that percussionists “will usually strike the same area of the cymbal unless otherwise instructed.”<sup>13</sup> The Percussive Arts Society agrees with Adams’ statement by saying that “the percussionist will play in the area that elicits the best tonal quality from the instrument.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is unnecessary to indicate any surface area specification unless the composer or arranger is ask-

ing for a specific musical color.

If the use of a special surface area is desired, it is best indicated by a brief word or two written above the music (such as “at bell,” “at edge” or “at center.”) If the indications of surface areas change so often that written text becomes cumbersome, an additional articulation mark may be included for clarity. It is recommended that the method approved by the International Conference on New Musical Notation be used for such indications. An illustration of this notation is shown in Ex. 16 and 17.

**Additional Articulations**—All other articulations found in the surveyed works were seen in fewer than 3% of the compositions. There is no doubt that literally hundreds of different timbres can be coaxed from the drumset by the use of special mallets and performance techniques combined with various surface areas. It would be

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an impossible task to codify every possible request from every composer, as innovative ideas for creating new sounds are constantly devised.

It is recommended that any additional performance techniques (such as rimshot variations or playing on the shell of a drum) be indicated with brief text. If the alterations and modifications occur so often as to make the use of text cumbersome, additional articulation systems should be devised. These additional articulations should be clearly defined in the key and strictly adhered to throughout the entire publication.

It is further recommended that the normal musical symbols for articulation and expression be avoided for the purpose of creating special articulation signs. Accent, marcato, tenuto, slurs, ties, staccato, staccatissimo and other markings usually associated with the normal expression of musical ideas should be avoided. In addition, individual or unconventional abbreviations should not be used for this purpose. Instead, composers and arrangers may be free to invent their own signs, or use special articulation symbols normally associated with non-percussion techniques.

**Sticking**—These guidelines recommend the use of the upper-case letters “R” and “L” for the indication of sticking. The method of writing an “R” above or below the note for the right hand and an “L” to indicate the left hand can be seen in over 73% of the surveyed works that use sticking indications. In addition, the recommendation of the Percussive Arts Society should be followed: “The sticking should not be included unless a specific sticking is necessary to produce a desired effect.”<sup>15</sup>

**Voicing for the Drumset**—The highest percentage of works surveyed for this paper write the drumset as a single voice, as two voices, or freely alternate between one and two voices. These voicing methods account for 80% of all surveyed precisely written works and 89% of all surveyed improvisational charts.

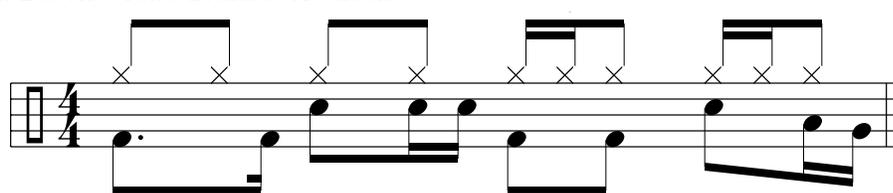
Ex. 18. Sticking Indications



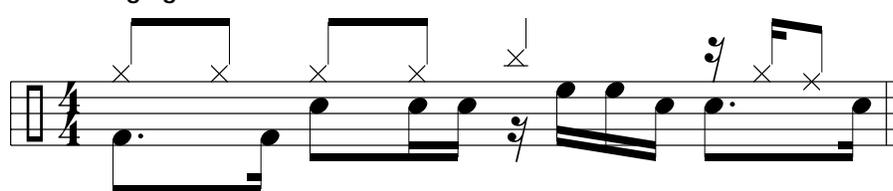
Ex. 19. One Voice Drumset Notation



Ex. 20. Two Voice Drumset Notation



Ex. 21. Changing from Vertical to Linear in the Same Measure



It is recommended that drumset music be written in one or two voices, depending on the musical context and the voicing that will provide the clearest intentions of the composer or arranger. Generally speaking, passages that are often called “beats” contain one or more instruments that perform an ostinato passage and one or more instruments that play a rhythmic figure of more freedom. Passages such as this are best notated in two voices. Passages that can be described as “fills” (horizontal or “linear” lines rather than a homophonic or “vertical” structure) are often best notated as a single voice. Changes between one and two voices in the same measure should be avoided. However, changes between one and two voices from one measure to another measure are acceptable.

Following general notational prac-

tices, when two lines of music are written on the same staff, the “stems of the upper part are drawn upward, the stems of the lower part downward, regardless of the position on the staff.”<sup>16</sup> The position of rests placed upon the staff can be shifted so that it is clear to what line the rest belongs. However, if a rest is “common to both lines, it can appear once at its normal position on the staff.”<sup>17</sup>

**Beaters**—The most common beater, other than the normal drum stick, is the brush, and the most common method of indicating the use of a brush is the written word. It is recommended that beaters be indicated by written word unless the composer or arranger feels that fast changes between a number of different beaters would be better understood by graphic symbols. If graphic symbols are to be used, they

should be defined in the key, and their use should be strictly observed throughout the publication.

The graphic symbol for a brush should be a pictogram of a brush. The symbol for a soft mallet should be an open circle at the end of a vertical line, and the symbol for a hard mallet should be a closed circle at the end of a vertical line. The symbol for a normal drumstick should consist of a pictogram of a drum stick or a very small closed circle at the end of a vertical line. Esoteric beaters (such as knitting needles, rattan sticks, Superballs or coins, to name but a few) should be indicated by a brief word in the score or defined as a graphic symbol in the key.

It is recommended that composers and arrangers not invent their own symbols for esoteric beaters if a common symbol already exists for this beater. When combinations of beaters are used in a graphic pictogram, it is recommended that the composer follow the guidelines approved by the International Conference on New Music Notation. It reads:

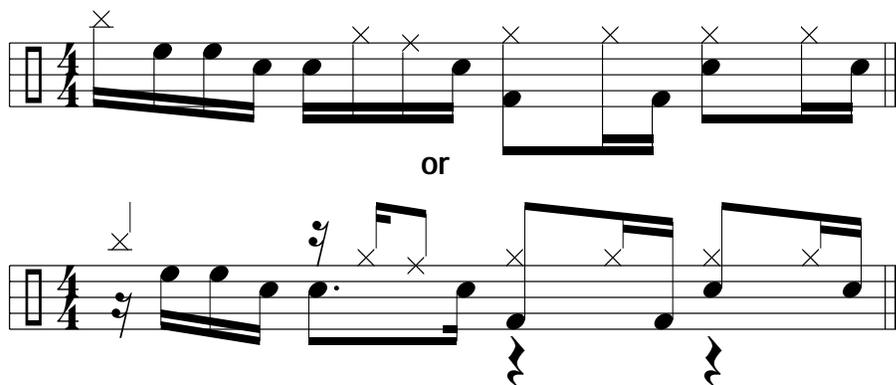
Combinations of sticks:

- All combinations should be boxed;
- Do not indicate L.H., R.H. at top of box;
- Always draw the striking end next to top of box<sup>18</sup>

**Written Instructions**—It is the recommendation of these guidelines that all written instructions be given in English. Instructions that are longer than a few words should be given a special symbol or short descriptive word and be defined as such in the key.

According to John O'Neill, the most common musical sign outside the staff is the written word.<sup>19</sup> However, it is cumbersome to include long passages of descriptive text in close relation to the staff. Karkoschka recommends that, "Symbols should be chosen where otherwise a lengthy text would be necessary, or when frequent recurrence makes it more convenient to use them instead of words."<sup>20</sup> Cope agrees when he writes: "If the verbal description becomes so long as to become cumber-

Ex. 22. Changing from Linear to Vertical in the Same Measure



Ex. 23. Symbols for Standard Beaters



some and space consuming, it is best to codify a single word or short phrase defining such, with further elaboration at the beginning of the score."<sup>21</sup>

Both authors are saying that an instruction such as: "Turn L.H. over (back of hand facing ceiling). Lay tip of stick on head and play with shoulder of stick on hoop."<sup>22</sup> should not be included in the notation. Instead, this instruction should be given a symbol or a brief descriptive term in the key, and used consistently throughout the publication.

#### IMPROVISATIONAL NOTATION

**Written Beats**—It is recommended that composers and arrangers provide the drumset player with a simplified version of a stylistically correct time pattern at the style's first appearance. If desired, additional clarity can be provided by the term "ad lib." written above the basic beat pattern.

If all composers and arrangers provided this service to all drummers, then younger players would be able to sight read a basic time pattern that was stylistically correct. When a composer or arranger begins a chart with only the instruction "Latin", young players are often left in the dark. In addition, expe-

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## Guidelines for Drumset Notation

### Ex. 24. Time Pattern Notation With Variations

Ex. 24 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff is divided into three sections: the first two measures are marked "Ad Lib." and the third measure is marked "Snare as written". The second staff is also divided into three sections, all marked "Ad Lib.". The notation includes various rhythmic figures with stems and beams, and some notes are marked with 'x' above them, likely indicating specific drum parts like cymbals or hi-hats.

### Ex. 25. Time Pattern Notation Without Variation

Ex. 25 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff is divided into three measures: the first measure is marked "Ad Lib." and contains a rhythmic pattern, while the second and third measures contain a slash with a vertical line through it (/:) and are marked with a "4" above the staff. The second staff is also divided into three measures: the first measure is marked "Ad Lib." and contains a rhythmic pattern, while the second and third measures contain a slash with a vertical line through it (/:) and are marked with an "8" above the staff.

rienced players would certainly not expect to play the basic time pattern note-for-note, as the "ad lib." indication clearly shows the composer's intent.

**Time Styles**—It is suggested that composers offer basic beat patterns that contain written notes for two or more instruments of the drumset. Composers and arrangers can use the following methods to indicate that the performer is to play time for an extended period after the initial basic beat pattern has been introduced: A written beat pattern should be used when specific rhythmic figures are desired or if the performer is to play certain rhythms exactly as written. In such cases, the composer or arranger may choose to add indications such as

"As written," "Bass drum as written," "Hi-hat as written," etc., for additional clarity. If these written indications are not added to the music, the performer should feel free to play (or not play) the notated passage.

The time style shown in Ex. 25 is recommended if the performer is free to improvise all parts. It is assumed that composers and arrangers will want to use both methods of time notation, depending on what best suits their needs.

**Fills**—Composers and arrangers commonly use the terms "Solo" and "Fill" seemingly without regard to the exact meaning of the text. It is recommended that the instruction "Solo" be used only when the performer is featured for the indicated length of time.

Similar to the use of the term in orchestral parts, "Solo" indicates that no other instruments in the ensemble are playing, or that the part is to stand out from the remaining instruments in the ensemble. The term "Fill" is much less specific, and should be used for all indications that are not solos. Three methods of notation are recommended for fills and solos: Precise fills—when the arranger knows exactly what he or she wants the performer to play; Rhythmic fills—when the arranger knows what rhythm the drummer should play, but will leave the exact instrumentation up to the performer; and Free fills—when the arranger allows the drummer to create rhythms and voicings for the passage.

**Precise Fills or Solos**—Obviously, precise fills or solos should be notated exactly as the composer wishes them to sound. So there can be no question that the performer is to play the written notes, the instruction “as written” should be included above the fill or solo.

**Rhythmic Fills or Solos**—When any rhythm is written in the staff with regular (or even “X”-shaped) note heads, it can easily be misinterpreted as notes for a particular instrument (drums or cymbals). It is recommended that all fills and solos that notate a rhythmic figure without indicating instruments, be written with slashed note heads on the middle line of the staff. Slashed notes heads should alleviate any possible misinterpretation by the performer.

**Free Fills or Solos**—It is recommended that composers and arrangers use a series of slashes to indicate improvisation.

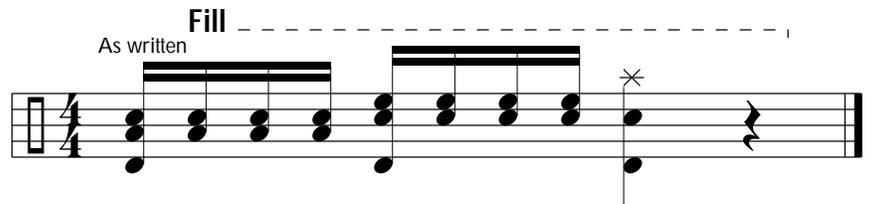
**Kicks**—It is recommended that all kick lines be written above the staff in cue-size notes. When kick lines are written in cue-size notes above the staff, their meaning is clear. It would be difficult to interpret kick lines as rhythms for any specific instrument in the drumset. In addition, it is recommended that all kick lines include a written indication that identifies the instrument or section performing the rhythm. This knowledge is vital to an intelligent, musical decision concerning how the performer will interpret the kick on the drumset.

**Structural Indications**—Since all kick lines will be identified by instrument, other structural indications are not required. However, the composer or arranger can be extremely helpful by providing indications concerning the composition’s form. Written indications such as “Intro,” “Verse,” “Head,” “Chorus,” “Bridge,” “Vamp,” etc., will provide both the novice and the professional with a clearer picture of the form.

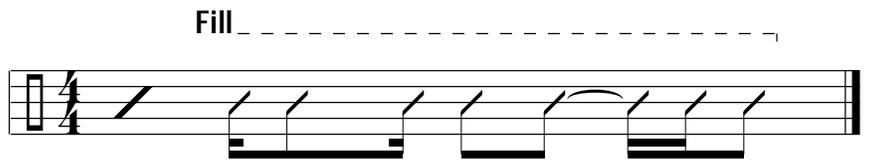
## SUMMARY

During the course of this survey, a startling number of notational variations

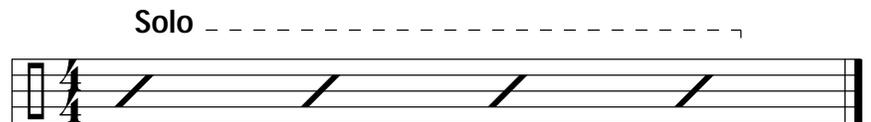
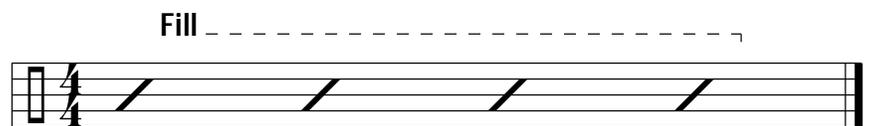
Ex. 26. Precise Fills or Solos



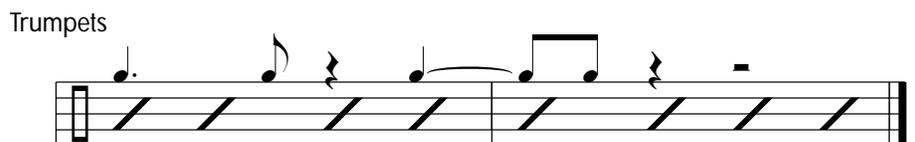
Ex. 27. Rhythmic Fill or Solo Notation



Ex. 28. Free Fill and Solo Notation



Ex. 29. Kick Line Notation



were found, including stave systems ranging from no lines to ten lines. Concerning the traditional five-line staff: six different positions for the snare drum, four different positions for the bass drum, and nearly 100 individual methods for notating tom-toms and cymbals were analyzed and cataloged. An amazing number of note heads and articulations were discovered in the literature: 91 individual note-head variations and 64 different articulations.

Obviously, the wide variety of notational procedures encountered in drumset notation can cause frustration for the novice and experienced

player alike. No other instrument in traditional ensemble organizations asks a musician to work within such a disorganized and ever-changing notational system. O'Neill realizes that learning a standard set of uniform symbols is much preferred to learning unstandardized notation. He writes: “In the identification of elements within a series, subjects learn faster if the elements can be identified with reference to a norm. Learning proceeds most rapidly if there is some perceivable structure, particularly if that structure is developed (reinforced) through physical presence.”<sup>23</sup>

## Guidelines for Drumset Notation

The notational system presented in these guidelines will suffice for the vast majority of current drumset notation. In fact, this system would be applicable for each of the 220 publications analyzed in this survey. As drumset performance requirements advance past their current point, these guidelines can be expanded to fit the needs of both the composer and performer.

If all composers, arrangers, editors, and publishers adopted the guidelines presented in this paper, many aspects of drumset performance would be enhanced. They would be performing a great service to the drumset musicians who are expected to properly interpret their creations.

### ENDNOTES

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9. John C. O'Neill, "Recent Trends in Percussion Notation," *Percussionist* 18 (Fall 1980): 51.
10. Herman Sabbe, Kurt Stone, and Gerald Warfield, eds., "International Conference on New Musical Notation Report," *Interface* 4 (November 1975): 33.
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16. Boehm, *Music Notation*, 33.
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18. Herman Sabbe, Kurt Stone, and Gerald Warfield, eds., "New Musical Notation Report," 77.
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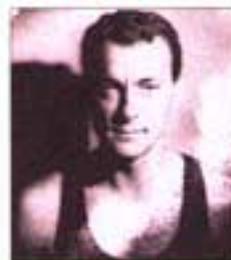
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