



# Anthony Cirone

## The Great American Symphony Orchestra Meredith Music Publications (September 1, 2011)

During a recent visit to Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana, USA, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that a guest visitor would be coming and addressing the percussion class that evening. It was none other than Anthony Cirone; percussionist, composer, writer and internationally renowned educator. As a university student, some 35 years ago, my teacher selected *Portraits in Rhythm* as a required text for snare drum. Each week I would prepare one of the études which carefully focused on a single aspect of snare drum technique and musicality. Prior to this text I had been working on rudimental solos for snare drum as well as orchestral excerpts. I remember being amazed that these wonderfully crafted pieces of music were actually technical studies. *Portraits in Rhythm* went on to become an international best-selling method book for snare drum. Over the years I would catch a glimpse of the famous Tony Cirone at various Percussive Arts Society International Conventions (P.A.S.I.C.'s) and other percussion get-togethers. I was so pleased to have the opportunity to spend an evening discussing percussion repertoire with one of my heroes of percussion music.

Anthony's latest contribution to percussion is a 208-page memoir covering topics such as:

- How does a musician gain position and orchestra?
- What is the relationship between the orchestra and the board of directors?
- How does the orchestra travel on tours?
- How do players get along with each other?
- How was the repertoire determined?

And the great question for both an orchestra and its supporters:

- How does it survive financially?

*The Great American Symphony Orchestra* is an engaging read prepared through a lifetime of personal experiences and communicated in a relaxed manner via anecdotes, quotes, and advice. He relates valuable information about his relationship with his teacher Saul Goodman and his colleagues in the San Francisco Symphony. The author shares his experiences performing under conductors Josef Krips, Seiji Ozawa, Edo De Waart, Herbert Blomstedt, Michael Tilson Thomas, Eugene Ormandy, Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland, and Arthur Fiedler as well as the various "ins and outs" of working in a professional orchestra. Of special note are the many quotes and comments from James Levine, John Barbarioli, Gustav Mahler, Daniel Barenboim, Herbert von Karajan, Leonard Bernstein, Arturo Toscanini, Carl Nielsen and Lou Harrison.

I really enjoyed spending time with this book and will actually place it on the required reading list for all of my percussion students in my studio. I can also highly recommend this book to all composers, producers, and most wholeheartedly to the patrons of Symphony Orchestras who would like to get a bird's eye, fly on the wall view, of this amazing artistic institution.

I'm also pleased to announce that included in this issue of PERCUSscene is a new article penned recently by Maestro Cirone on the interpretation of percussion parts. I am certain you will enjoy this super feature in PERCUSscene Vol. 2.

## On Musical Interpretation in Percussion Performance

Composers vary in their use of musical elements when composing; many only use the basic minimum - while others flood notation with expression marks and terms. As performers, we are at the mercy of these elements to help us make musical decisions.

Basic elements of music notation are: dynamics, articulations, phrasing, musical directives, and tempo markings. Let's take a closer look at each of them to see what they provide to the performer:

- 1) **Dynamics:** *pppp*, *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, *fff*, *ffff*. Each one of these dynamic markings may have a *piú* or *meno* indication, meaning *more* or *less*. The range of dynamics greatly influences the music's character. Music ranging from *p* to *f* does not sound as exciting as music expressed in a range from *pppp* to *ffff*. When placed together, (*fp*, *fpp*, *mfp*, etc.) dynamic markings can also produce immediate changes in volume.

A series of sforzando indications reinforce the dynamic level at any given moment: *sf*, *sfz*, *sfzz*, *sfzzz*. If the dynamic level is *f* and the composer adds *sfz* to any given note, it increases the dynamic of that particular note within the *f* level. The sforzando may be used with any dynamic level reinforcing the sound within the existing dynamic.

- 2) **Articulations:** When an articulation is added to a note, it changes the attack. The articulations can be very dramatic or quite subtle and vary depending on the instrument. When an articulation is added to a percussion instrument (which does not produce a sustained sound), the effect is felt as an accent. The following is a list of commonly used articulations:



For percussion instruments, each of the articulations in the above order produces a stronger accent on the attack. Articulations for instruments that sustain sounds (such as woodwinds, brass, and strings), also affect the length of the note value, for instance, a *staccato* attack shortens the note value, while a *tenuto* affects the full note value.

The above articulations can be combined; for instance, a *staccato* mark can be added to a *tenuto*, *accent*, or *wedge accent*, which shortens the attack. Adding an *sfz* to articulations will further exaggerate the attack.



- 3) **Phrasing:** When a slur is added to two or more notes, it dictates the shape of the musical line. This is described as playing the notes in a smooth and connected manner. The following musical line is written in two ways: No phrase or articulations at all (*marcato*), and with the addition of articulations and slurs.

When a group of notes are under a slur, begin the phrase with a slight emphasis and add a slight *diminuendo* as the phrase ends. The following two measures are written without any articulations or phrasing (as we often see for keyboard percussion instruments), and, then, how this should be played to create a musical performance.



- 4) **Musical Directives:** One of the most effective ways composers communicate the character of music is through musical directives (in *italics*), they are usually found below the staff. Some of the more common ones are: *cresc.*, *dim.*, *accel.*, and *rit.* They give important directions relating to dynamic levels and tempo changes. Other common directives address the style and character of the music: *morendo*, *cantabile*, *secco*, *marcato*, *espressivo*, *dolce* and *agitato*. A few of the more subtle directives are: *smorzando*, *scorrevole*, *sonoro*, and *perdendosi*.
- 5) Besides foreign terms, contemporary composers also use English words to communicate musical directives. As performers, we appreciate any clues in the score; however, when directives are missing, we have to find ways to express and communicate the music based on our own interpretation.

- 6) **Tempo Markings:** The exact tempo a composer desires can easily be indicated with a metronome marking. Quite a bit of Classical repertoire represents tempi with such common markings as: Allegro, Moderato, Andante, Largo, etc. These markings give a broad indication of the tempo, but not much else! Tempo markings followed by a character indication (Allegro maestoso; Moderato e pesante; Andante cantabile and Largo e grave) go a long way in describing the music's character.

## Further Details

As we study excerpts from percussion literature, we will analyse information provided by composers (or the lack thereof); and, based upon the above elements of music, add as much interest and excitement as possible to the performance.

What has not yet been addressed - and is of particular importance - is the exact instrumentation intended by the composer. When a composer asks for cymbals (*Piatti* in Italian, *Becken* in German, or *Cymbales* in French) and gives us no further information, the player can be confused as to whether the part should be played on a pair of crash cymbals or a single suspended cymbal. This is also true for snare, tenor, and field drums. Since we will be dealing with foreign terms, I suggest using *Cirone's Pocket Dictionary of Foreign Musical Terms* (which has a special section on percussion instruments).

Let's begin by looking at three excerpts for timpani from Beethoven's music to learn that the written note values do not necessarily indicate how long to sustain the sound. Composers continue to write for "the moment of attack" without regard as to when the sound should be dampened. This is true for all resonating percussion instruments (cymbals, gongs, triangle, timpani, bass drum, orchestra bells, vibraphone, chimes, etc)

## Symphony No. 1: 1st Mvt. by Ludwig van Beethoven

Look at measures 88, 89, and 90 from the first movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 1*.

m. 88

French Horn  
In C

Trumpet  
In C

Timpani

- 1) Beethoven adds the timpani to the trumpet and French horn parts. However, instead of writing the half note tied to a quarter note, he simply writes for the "moment of attack," using a quarter-note value. By studying the score, we see that all instruments entering on the third beat of these two measures (including cello and bass) have the same notation as the French horn and trumpet - except the timpani. If the timpanist plays the notes as written and dampens on the following rest, the timpani will stop resonating and its glorious sound will disappear from the orchestration. It will be as if the bottom of the orchestral timbre dropped out!
- 2) The timpanist, therefore, should sustain the first G until the second beat of the second measure and the second G through the following quarter-note rest so it matches the trumpet and French horns. The third G is added to support the woodwinds, who enter in this measure, with a *staccato* quarter note. In other words, the first two Gs are long and the third G is short. Here is how the part should be performed:

Timpani

## Symphony No. 5: 1st Mvt. by Ludwig van Beethoven

- 1) The 1<sup>st</sup> movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, measures 43 to 48, has a similar example - with one exception. Beethoven now pairs the timpani and the trumpet while the French horns sustain their notes.

m. 43

French Horn  
In C

Trumpet  
In C

Timpani

- 2) This example is different from the first excerpt, the question is: should the timpanist play quarter notes with the trumpet or let the sound of the second entrance ring with the French horns? In order to answer it, we must agree that Beethoven is continuing to write for "the moment of attack" by using quarter notes for the timpani part (as in the first example). Since Beethoven used quarter notes in the first excerpt (where everyone else was playing long notes), I believe we are safe in assuming this is also true for the above example. A musical interpretation for this excerpt would therefore be for the timpanist to play the first C as a quarter note with the trumpets and French horns (dampening on the quarter-note rest) and playing the second C and following G long. In this way, the resonating sound blends with the horns. In other words, the first C is short and the second C and final G are long. I believe the part should be performed as follows:

Timpani

*sf* *f*

- 3) Notice the trumpet and French horn both have an *sf* marking on the first entrance, but the timpani only has an *f*. More excitement is added if the timpanist also plays the first entrance with an *sf*, matching the brass.

## Symphony No. 1: 1st Mvt. by Ludwig van Beethoven

Going back to the first movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 1*, from measure 100 through the first ending, we see another excerpt that demonstrates the need for interpreting the timpani part.

m. 100

Cor.

Tr.

Tp.

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Vla.

C.B.

- Again, Beethoven notates the entire excerpt as quarter notes. The first *fp* G is paired with the trumpets; but, as before, it sounds better if this note is sustained with the horns. The *fp* indication for a single note on the timpani is a bit difficult to produce. To obtain the *fp* effect while still allowing the note to sustain, I suggest slightly muffling the drum after striking the note so a decay in the sound is produced.
- The next three Gs also need to sustain with the horns, but remember to continue to play them at the *p* level.
- The final *ff* G can be interpreted in two ways: Play it short with the strings or let it sustain with the woodwinds. I prefer the second choice.

By using this interpretation, the timpani part is notated as follows:

Tp.

*fp* (*p*) *ff*