

PERCUSSION MATTERS JOHN H BECK

By Gary France

John Beck is a name that needs no introduction a short list of his students includes: Steve Gadd, William Cahn, Bob Becker, Gordon Stout, Leigh Howard Stevens, Christopher Lamb, John R Beck, and Michael Burritt.

This excerpt represents just a few from the list of his 258 percussion students who studied at the famed Eastman School of Music. "Professor Emeritus of Percussion John H. Beck has been a member of the Eastman faculty since 1959, receiving his bachelor's degree (1955) and master's degree (1962), as well as Performer's Certificate from Eastman. He retired from Eastman in 2008 and continues as Professor Emeritus of Percussion and teaches a class in The History of Percussion.

Beck's career as a performer and teacher includes posts as percussionist, timpanist, marimba soloist with the United States Marine Band (1955-59); principal percussionist with the Rochester Philharmonic (1959-62); and timpanist for the Rochester Philharmonic (1962-2002). He has made numerous solo appearances, including performances with the Eastman Wind Ensemble and Philharmonia Orchestra, Syracuse Wind Ensemble, Chautauqua Band, Rochester Chamber Orchestra, Corning Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Memphis State Wind Ensemble, Pennsylvania Festival Band, and Filharmonia Pomorska, Poland. Other engagements have included, the faculty of the Grand Teton Orchestra Seminar, conductor of the Penfield Symphony, performer, clinician, teacher, and conductor for the International Workshops for Percussion in Bydgoszcz, Poland; adjudicator for the International Percussion Competition in Luxembourg; the Japan Music Education and Culture Promotion in Tokyo, Japan; Timpani Competition, Paris, France and Snare Drum Competition, Atlanta, Georgia. He was percussionist in residence at the Royal Academy of Music in Copenhagen, Denmark; the Royal Northern Academy of Music in Manchester, England, the Interlochen Center for the Arts Summer Program and Rowan University, NJ. Clinician for the International Foundation for Performing Arts Medicine, New Jersey; soloist and instructor at

the Encontro Latino Americanos De Percussao in Santa Maria, Brazil; instructor, clinician, adjudicator and performer for the Giornate della Percussione Competition in Fermo, Italy; Kosa International Percussion Workshops in Vermont; International Forum of Percussion in Zagan, Poland; Crossdrumming Percussion Festival in Warsaw, Poland; Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, Vilnius, Lithuania; 10th Anniversary of Neopercussion, Madrid, Spain; National Youth Orchestra, Seville, Spain and the International Percussion Workshops in Croatia. He has also toured Russia with 14 percussionists from the Percussive Arts Society.

As a conductor, Beck has appeared with the Eastman Percussion Ensemble (1962-2008); in a tour of South America with the Aeolian Consort as percussion soloist (1977); and has participated in numerous guest conducting and percussion clinics in the United States and Europe.

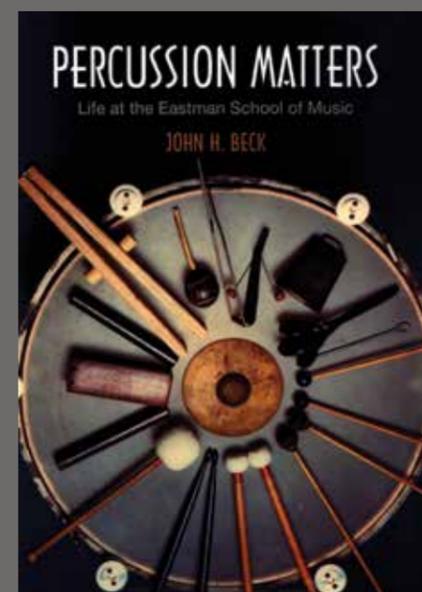
Articles by Beck have been published in Music Journal, The Instrumentalist, Woodwind World, Brass and Percussion, and Percussive Notes; he was also percussion columnist for the National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors (NACWPI) Journal (1965-72). He has also contributed articles to the Grove Dictionary of American Music and the World Book Encyclopedia. Carl Fischer, Boston Music, Kendor Music, Meredith Music, MCA, Wimbledon Music, Inc., Studio 4 Productions, and CPP Belwin have published his compositions. His Encyclopedia of Percussion is in its second edition and is published by Routledge. He has served as state chairman for percussion, New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA, 1970-72); president of the New York State Percussive Arts Society (1976-82); national second vice president (1982-84), first vice president (1984-86), and president of the national Percussive Arts Society (1987-90).

Among the honors Beck has received include being named the Mu Phi Epsilon Musician of the Year (1976); the Monroe County School Music Association Award (1996); Eastman's Eisenhart Award for Excellence in Teaching (1997); and the Arts and Cultural Council of Greater Rochester Award for contributions to the arts (1999). He was inducted into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in 1999.

The Percussive Arts Society presented him with an Outstanding Service Award (2002). At Eastman's 2003 Commencement, he was awarded the Edwin Peck Curtis Award for excellence in undergraduate teaching. The Commission Project presented him with the JD Award for outstanding service to music education in 2004. Since retirement in 2008, he has been awarded the Distinguished Service Award from the New York State School Music Association (2009), The President's Award from Rowan University (2010), the Lifetime Achievement Award from KOSA International Percussion (2010) and the Life Time Achievement Award from Giornate della Percussione, Fermo, Italy (2010). His book PERCUSSION MATTERS: Life at the Eastman School of Music was published in December 2011 by Meliora Press an imprint of the University of Rochester Press. The John Beck Composition Prize established by Percussion Rochester, a biennial percussion festival, will be awarded as a highlight of the 2012 festival.¹

John Beck's recently published book "Percussion Matters Life at the Eastman School of Music, (2011) chronicles the history of percussion at the Eastman School of Music as well as providing autobiographical information about one of the worlds' great percussion educators, and industry icons. John Beck (JB) provides us a fascinating snapshot of his early years while he was mentored by William Street, stories about his contemporary's and his students, most all who also became pioneers in percussion performance practice throughout the USA and internationally. The eight chapters and 28 illustrations share incites into the nuts and bolts of balancing a career tight rope that included performing, teaching, the administration of a university percussion program and providing inspirational leadership to the Percussive Arts Society.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this insightful book and would like to share with you a few of the quotations from students that, for me, provided a snapshot into the soul of one of the worlds most famous percussion departments where the combination of like minded passionate students, under the mentorship of a special personality can result in synergy, "where the whole is greater than



the sum of the parts"....

..." George Clinton is the Godfather of Funk. James Brown is the Godfather of Soul, and John Beck is, hands-down, the Godfather of Percussion"²

..." he was always there to listen to me play no matter what kind of music I was playing."³

...You personally saw the potential in each student and let him or her explore it for themselves, without judgement, while reminding them of the essentials of good playing."⁴

...JB allowed us to be ourselves as a person and as a percussionist, which is why his legacy of students is a vast spectrum of diverse musicians."⁵

... As Bill Street would have said, "it's about the music and the sound, don't you know? As JB took over the percussion department, the excellent Eastman focus on orchestral percussion and the importance of "doing it all well" continued and grew, as did our percussion ensemble experiences. Great music, great teaching and now the great network of Eastman percussion colleges is indeed a lifetime treasure to celebrate and enjoy."⁶

I recently caught up with John Beck and had the opportunity to ask a few questions:

I have really enjoyed your release of The Complete Works of William Street. I find the exercises both fun and challenging! Can you shed some light on the prescribed tempos, some are really in the stratosphere. Was Bill Street able to play at these tempos or were they a guide or life-time goal to strive for?

Bill Street would write exercises and solos for use to play in our lessons. He never wrote a book. Harrison Powley and I thought it would be a nice tribute to William G. Street if we collected this material and put it in a book. Harrison and I searched our libraries and between the two of us found the material he had written. Did we play the exercises at the tempo suggested? Probably not, I think he used them as a challenge to us. Did he play them at the suggested tempos? Probably not.

Many people around the world know you for your many compositions for solo and ensemble

percussion. Your work Overture for Percussion and Concerto for Drumset and Percussion Ensemble are is some of the most performed percussion ensembles in the world. Would you please reflect about your composing career as well as these seminal works?

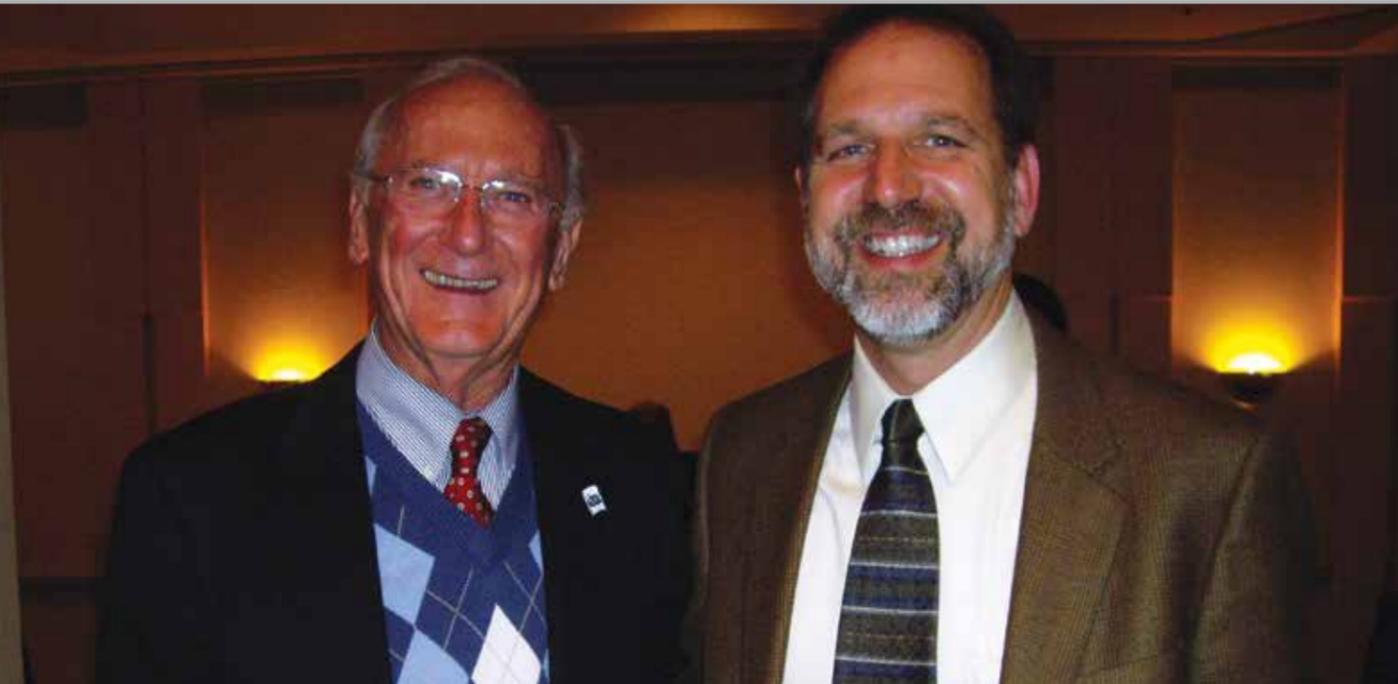
I started composing while a camper at the Interlochen Summer Camp in 1952. I was asked by the Dance Department to write two pieces for dancers and percussion. One was to have a Jazz influence and the other a military march influence. Jazz Miniature and Little March were the result. . These are the first and they are easy percussion ensembles. This started the juices flowing and I got interested in composing. While a student at Eastman I was exposed to other percussion ensembles and I felt that I had something to say in this area. I also got interested in writing for solo timpani because I was not that impressed with

what was being written. Rudimental drumming was also an interest and I have several solos in that area.

Overture for Percussion was written because I needed a piece for the beginning of a percussion ensemble concert. I wanted to write a piece that reflected all the potential of the percussion instruments – melody and rhythm and also start the concert in the same manner as an overture does for an opera.

Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble was always on my mind as I felt the drum set could be showcased in a percussion ensemble setting. I wanted to write a piece that had Jazz influence in the beginning, a slow almost improvisatory middle section and then a fast two-beat show style for the ending. Of course there had to be a big drum solo before it ended. This also gave me a concerto to play when I do clinics.

Concerto for Timpani and Percussion Ensemble,



a message from the current President of the Percussive Arts Society

THE LEGACY CONTINUES JOHN R BECK

like the Concerto for Drum Set, had been on my mind so I set out to compose a concerto for timpani. I wanted to show the melodic potential of the instrument, the dramatic potential and the potential for the player to improvise upon a given set of notes. The first and last sections are written in a strict note-wise manner but the middle section is written in a special type of notation with only suggested tempo markings. Various mallets are used as well as hands and snare drum sticks. This all takes place as the ensemble improvises on a given set of rhythmic patterns. This also gives me a concerto to play when I do clinics.

Jazz Variants was written to show the potential of the percussion ensemble in various styles of music – Rock, Jazz and Show. Since percussion instruments are used in all styles of music this ensemble illustrates that potential. Besides it is fun to play.

I have written solos for snare drum, timpani and multiple percussion and one piece for marimba. I enjoy writing for percussion. One thing I always have in mind when writing is that it must be musical,

have some educational value, incorporate some improvisation if appropriate, and be fun to play for both the player and the audience.

I remember being present, as a student, at the very first Percussive Arts Society International Convention in 1976, which you hosted at the Eastman School of Music. For me, this career inspiring moment cemented my passion for PAS as an organization. During your tenure as President of the Percussive Arts Society you did much to reach out to our international chapters. Is there a message that you would like to send to young percussionists through out the world about the Percussive Arts Society?

Since the first Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC) at the Eastman School of Music the society has grown to become the major percussion society in the world. Over 8000 members enjoy receiving percussion education on all aspects of percussion. The percussion community is worldwide and with the internet it stays close together. The mission of PAS is to PROMOTE PERCUSSION EDUCATION. I realize that each international

country has their own percussion society and with the communication with PAS it is possible to promote this education with them as well as they communicating their ideas. This is a win win concept. PAS Electronic Memberships are affordable and enjoyed by many international members.

I am excited to be working closely with your son John R Beck in his role as the current president of the Percussive Arts Society. Can you please describe the roll the Past Presidents play in the stewardship of our organization?

The past presidents having been involved in all aspects of the Percussive Arts Society over many years have the insight into concerns of the society from the membership, administration, Hall of Fame recommendations, to the involvement with the Percussion Industry. They also remain on the Board of Directors to give their input. Their collective knowledge assures that future matters are handled in a productive manner. Each past president had to deal with a unique set of circumstances during their administration; therefore, they can be helpful when such matters are again discussed. On a side note, I am thrilled that my son John R. Beck is now the PAS President to administer his ideas for a successful society.

Endnotes:

1. http://www.esm.rochester.edu/faculty/beck_john/
2. Beck, J. (2011). *Percussion matters : life at the Eastman School of Music*. Rochester, NY, Meliora Press.
3. Beck, J. (2011). *Percussion matters : life at the Eastman School of Music*. Rochester, NY, Meliora Press.
4. Beck, J. (2011). *Percussion matters : life at the Eastman School of Music*. Rochester, NY, Meliora Press.
5. Beck, J. (2011). *Percussion matters : life at the Eastman School of Music*. Rochester, NY, Meliora Press.
6. <http://www.pas.org/experience/halloffame/BeckJohnH.aspx>



Opportunity, Discovery, Community, Quality, Service It is a humbling experience to compose this message entitled "From the President" to be published in PERCUSscene Magazine. The Percussive Arts Society has been part of my life since I attended the first Percussive Arts Society International Convention (P.A.S.I.C) at the Eastman School of Music in 1976, when I was in high school. Having literally grown up with the organization and reflecting on how the past 36 years have influenced my performing, teaching, and musical perspectives, I believe that

PAS can best be described as a professional instrument organization that is a diverse and passionate community of musicians who love to share ideas. Anyone who has been to a PAS event, from an Australian Day of Percussion to PASIC, has experienced the camaraderie of spending time with enthusiastic percussionists. Our PAS connections go far beyond simple business and education relationships.

PAS embraces five core values: Opportunity, Discovery, Community, Quality, and Service. These core values inform the many activities that our educators, performers and industry partners engage in every day.

The PAS Rhythm! Discovery Center in Indianapolis, U.S.A. also encompasses these values. In 2012, USA Today identified our interactive museum as "one of the top 10 places in the nation for hands-on music making." We are proud to offer services to a wide variety of people, from researchers and educators to drum enthusiasts and the curious public. As percussionists, we have a unique opportunity to immediately connect with people through our instruments and music. We are excited about the potential for outreach and scholarship that the Discovery Center provides and thank all those members who have donated instruments,

music, historical artifacts, and their time to Rhythm! Through the information super highway (World Wide Web) our international members and chapters can easily experience the exciting exhibitions, 50 years of publication archives and streamed events offered through Rhythm! Discovery Center.

The future is exciting for PAS with new leadership and new ideas. I look forward to working with our international partners and the new Executive Committee team to continue to make PAS a leader among music service organizations as we promote percussion education, research, performance and appreciation throughout the world.

PAS values highly DRUMscene / PERCUSscene magazine's outstanding commitment to our industry and I am proud to celebrate our shared dreams. I also applaud the efforts of Chapter President Gary France and the PAS leadership team to promote percussion education and performance in Australia. Join PAS, subscribe to PERCUSscene, get involved with your PAS Australia Chapter state representatives, attend one of Australia's five National Days of Percussion and make plans to come to the biggest Drums and Percussion event in the world, PASIC 2014. Connect to the almost eight thousand like-minded people who are passionate to share their dreams and experiences about drums and percussion.

