

Items of interest about percussion
from:
THE INDIANAPOLIS PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

Indianapolis Percussion
Ensemble c/o 16 Digby Ct.
Indpls. 24, Indiana.

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The Indianapolis Percussion Ensemble is a professional percussion ensemble that is presenting to audiences in this area a new type of musical group that is proving to be both enjoyable and educational. Performing on the marimba, vibraphone, timpani, all of the drums, and the Latin-American instruments, their programs vividly display the great variety of music possible from percussion instruments.

The ensemble is in the midst of a busy season performing concerts in the Indianapolis areas as a member group of the Young Audience's, Inc. Last November, the ensemble played for: The Indiana School for the Blind, and Indpls. Public Schools #14 & #15. During December, schools to hear the ensemble included: Public School #42, St. Bridget School, Saint's Peter & Paul School, and Park School for Boys. In January, programs were given at: Public Schools #23 & #33.

On February 20th, the Indianapolis Percussion Ensemble traveled to Tipton, Ind. to appear on their high school assembly series. Following the return of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra from their tour of the Southwestern states, the ensemble will perform April 5th for the Midwest Music Clinic at the Indiana School for the Blind. This will be the first annual conference of music teachers from schools for the blind; Dr. Kenneth Appleton, general chairman, reports that teachers will attend from many Midwestern states. Also included in the program is a percussion clinic by James Moore of the percussion ensemble.

A second significant event is Young Audience's week; from April 15th to 20th the six Indianapolis chapter ensembles will appear in schools throughout Marion County. The Indianapolis Percussion Ensemble will play at the following schools: Fall Creek School, Park School for Boys, Public School #16, Brook Park School, Indiana School for the Deaf, Public School #57, and Holy Spirit School.

April 1st will find the Dick Schory Percussion Pops Orchestra appearing at the Murat Theater in Indianapolis. Programmed on the Community Concert Series, it is significant that percussion is today being accepted and programmed on this type of series.

In observing the recent Indiana State High School Solo & Ensemble Auditions (contest) held at Butler University on February 16th, it was encouraging to note the fine rudimental work in the solo area, and the solid drum work in the dance band classification. In the percussion solo area have any students considered solos on multiple drums, concert style snare, or dance set? Could teachers be broader, and less limited in their presentation of materials to students to use for solo entries? Are there IMEA rules written or implied that are limiting the scope of the percussion solo entry? Comments and thoughts about this would be welcome and will be aired in coming issues.

Last December, before the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra concert in Orchestra Hall, Chicago, the Indianapolis Percussion Ensemble members had the opportunity to tour the new Slingerland Drum Company plant located in Niles, Illinois. Cordial hosts, H.H. "Bud" Slingerland, Haskell Harr, and Lee Hickle gave us a most interesting tour of the plant and a run down of its operation. They have been in the new building less than two years; we were very impressed by the efficiency of the new facilities and its operation.

***** PEOPLE IN PERCUSSION *****

Each issue of Percussive Notes will include sketches of percussion educators, professional players, and outstanding students in percussion. Through fine work of many teachers and students, we are seeing an outstanding growth in the technical and musical aspects of percussion. In this column we wish to commend those active in this work.

ERWIN MUELLER - Timpanist of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, member of the Indianapolis Percussion Ensemble, and head of the percussion department of Ball State Teacher's College and Indiana Central College. A graduate of Ball State and Northwestern University, he studied with Edward Metzenger, the renowned timpanist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Mr. Mueller's skills and experience is evident in his performance on timpani and all phases of percussion.

RICHARD PAUL - Percussionist with Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, member of the Indianapolis Percussion Ensemble, and head of the percussion department of Indiana State College. He has studied under Charles Menzie, Butler University, and Myron Collins, California percussion artist. Mr. Paul's broad professional experience includes four years with top U.S. Navy bands on the West Coast and in the Far East.

Percussive Notes will review method books, reference books, solos, ensembles, and recordings that have been proven effective in teaching and performance. Also, newly published material will be reviewed.

BROOK DOUBLE DRUM STUDIES - by Emile Sholle, pub. Brook Publishing Company, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. \$1.50 This method book has proven effective for transition from snare drum study to dance set study. Starting with steady bass drum foot pedal beats, it progresses to more intricate patterns. The "dance drum feel" can be furthered by playing the exercises on the first few pages with a 4 beat bass drum and Hi-Hat cymbals on 2 and 4.

CONTEST SOLOS FOR SNARE DRUM - by Harr, Salmon, Stover, & Collins, pub. Slingerland Drum Co., Niles, Ill., no charge. Each member of the Slingerland Drum Company's board of advisors has contributed a solo to this publication that is available for the asking from the Slingerland Drum Company or their dealers.

DRUMS THROUGH THE AGES - by Charles White, pub. Sterling Press, Los Angeles, Calif., \$7.50 For forty years the author has been timpanist of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, and for many years a faculty member of the School of Music University of Southern California. Realizing that almost everyone who walks near drums has an impelling urge to touch and play them, caused Mr. White's thoughts to arise that led to the writing of this book. Fascinating reading to layman and musician alike, the book is written in a non-technical, descriptive manner.

THE MARIMBA - INSTRUMENT OF SINGING WOOD

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The marimba, one of the oldest instruments known to man, originated in ages past as man first obeyed his impulses to strike objects of wood that produced musical tones. The primitive marimba was fashioned of slabs of wood suspended over large resonating gourds, producing a haunting and mystic sound to the ears of the native tribes of Africa and Latin-America. They felt that this instrument of "singing wood" had supernatural powers that influenced their very lives. To be chosen a marimba player in the tribal chiefs band was a great honor to the tribesman and this became his principle vocations in the tribe for his lifetime.

How different is the modern marimba of today; the heart of the instrument is the bars of highly polished rosewood, extending chromatically for a range of four octaves or more. The massive framework is mounted on wheels that allow the instrument to be rolled about conveniently. The gracefully arched resonating pipes have replaced the primitive gourds, and aid greatly in amplifying the tone of this instrument of "singing wood".

The type of mallet used to strike the marimba influences greatly the quality of tone. Soft yarn mallets produce a mellow, rich tones. Rubber headed mallets produce a slightly more brilliant, penetrating tone. Hard rubber or plastic mallets produce a brittle, harsh tone. This last quality of tone is more characteristic of the xylophone, an instrument very closely related to the marimba.

Only in the past century has the marimba emerged as an accepted means of performance of art music in the western world. Therefore the instrument existed only as a folk or native culture instrument. Had the modern marimba been available to composers of the Baroque period, its delicate keyboard nuances might very possibly drawn attention of composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederick Handel. Some of the above composer's works have been transcribed very effectively for marimba ensembles.

The Mexican people call marimbas "wood that sings", and rightly they should for in the rugged areas of Central America the marimba is king. Marimba orchestras are as numerous and popular in the south of Mexico and in neighboring Guatemala, as are small piano, drums, and bass "combos" in the United States. Native craftsmen take months to find and process the proper wood from the forests, and then slowly they fashion the slabs of wood into amazingly true-toned musical instruments.

In the United States, the marimba and xylophones gained perhaps their greatest prominence in that great age of entertainment called, "Vaudeville". One of the real show stopping acts would be the marimba solo with a chorus to swing into a "soft-shoe" dance routine to one of the hits of the day such as, "Nola".

As the construction of the modern marimba improved and the technical ability of players increased, marimbists began playing intricate solos with four mallets, two in each hand! In the 1930's and 1940's Clair O. Musser organized in Chicago marimba ensembles of large numbers and of excellent musical ability. Many of his arrangements and compositions are played by marimbists today.

Until very recently, the marimba repertory consisted mainly of transcriptions of classical works, folk songs, and popular song arrangements. Today at least two prominent composers, Paul Creston and Robert Kurka, have written concertos for the marimba; and the French composer, Darius Milhaud has written a concerto for marimba and vibraphone.

The increased use of mallet percussion instruments including the marimba, xylophone, vibraphone, orchestra bells, and chimes in both classical and popular orchestras point to even a more promising future as more composers become aware of the musical possibilities of these instruments.

Letters received from young grade school listeners of the Indianapolis Percussion Ensemble express their enthusiasm and candid reactions about this "new" music:

"We appreciated you coming to our school and showing us the strange instruments."

"We learned a lot about percussion instruments. Thank you for coming to our school. It was a wonderful program."

"Our class liked your percussion program better than any other program we have ever heard. I hope some day to become a percussion player."

"I was very interested in the way you demonstrated and explained the percussion instruments."

"I never knew there were so many different sounds in the percussion ensemble!"

"Dear Gents:"

"You were so fine,
that you can come back any old time,
because there is no use in discussing,
that we like your fine percussion."

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