

Lot Patrol



BENJAMIN GERVAIS

BEN GERVAIS IS CURRENTLY THE DRUM MAJOR FOR THE COLTS DRUM & BUGLE CORPS. BEFORE BECOMING DRUM MAJOR, BEN MARCHED IN THE CYMBAL LINE FOR 3 YEARS.

BEN IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE VIC FIRTH EDUCATION TEAM AND HAS TAUGHT OR ARRANGED FOR SAVANNAH HIGH SCHOOL IN SAVANNAH, MO AND THE NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY DRUMLINE.

BEN IS PURSUING A DEGREE IN INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC EDUCATION AT NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE IN MARYVILLE, MO.

[How long have you been involved with percussion, specifically marching percussion and drumline?](#)

I have been involved with percussion since middle school. I marched in the Shawnee Mission Northwest High school drumline in their snare line for 3 years. My last year I was the drum captain and snare section leader. I then marched in The Colts cymbal line for 3 years. This year I became the drum major which is where I intend to age out in 2006. I currently march in the snare line at Northwest Missouri State University.

[What inspired you and why, to choose the drumline?](#)

My inspiration towards the marching circuit began my freshman year of high school; I was heavily inspired by the drum captain of our high school line. He was a prodigy tenor player that slaved for hours on self perfection of the drumming arts. He was a senior and graduated after my first year of high school. He taught me to teach myself, which I am forever in debt to him. He marched in the Colts tenor line in 2000 and 2001, which got me interested with The Colts as well. I still keep in contact with him, and he is still my mentor. My original inspiration for drumming was Ringo Star.

In the beginning, when you were first starting into marching perc. Was there anything you thought was too difficult or anything that made you think of giving up? What got you past that point?

I honestly thought it was the best thing in the world. It was hard at first when I would contrast myself with my mentor. However, just spending hours practicing at home got me through my frustrations after a while. I would get frustrated just practicing at times, but it takes time to train yourself to focus and control your thoughts. Once you do it, you can relax and drum for hours a day with no break. It is very rewarding.

When you were with The Colts, what was most memorable to you or what did you enjoy the most? Was there an instructor who had a great impact on you?

When I was with The Colts cymbal line, the cymbal tech Lauren Paul was the greatest influence. She made me want to march in the Cymbal line for 3 years. Her knowledge and compassion is beyond anyone I have ever seen before. She has filled me with immense cymbal knowledge that I still carry with me today. Her teachings have made me a stronger musician, educator and person. Also, The Colts caption head, Ryan Thomas. He is an inspiration to me because I love his writing, and he is an amazing player. What makes it even more amazing is that his right hand is a baby hand...we tend to give him crap for it too.

When instructing, do you ever feel that there was a student that was not working as hard as he or she should have? Do you believe it's detrimental to the rest of the line? How do you work past this?

There is always a time when someone is not working as hard as they could. There are many times when I don't teach as well as I should. The way to overcome it is to let them inspire themselves to work for it. If they lack in work ethic because they are tired, it will be easy to overcome. If they lack work ethic because of the lack of desire, it makes it difficult to inspire someone to work for themselves. Never give up on the students. The minute you give up, is when they will too.

More often in high school there seems to be the attitude of, "If a snare line can't play traditional they can't be very great players." Do you think this is true?

I am a huge advocate of traditional grip with snare lines, even in high school. I feel that it gives them a sense of pride that they worked on something unique. If it is done well, you will receive praise for it. It is a complex art form that needs to be perfected. If not, the results will be bitter. It takes time and patience to build the chops necessary to build a solid traditional grip foundation. Whether or not you have your snare line use traditional grip, there will still always be room for improvement.

When teaching the snares, do you find it difficult to have your players reach the point where they create an even sound with both hands even though the grip is different between hands?

The most difficult thing for traditional grip is getting 5 to sound like 1. There are always going to be different interpretations on traditional grip from instructor to instructor, but as long as it stays consistent in the line, it will be effective.

In regards to matched grip, do you find it useful that this grip more easily can be transferred to other instruments or is that not a factor?

I don't prefer to have students transfer instruments. I want them to master the art of their particular desire. There will be time to learn other instruments when one is mastered. Plus, who is it easier on, the students, or the teacher? The students can learn traditional grip as easy as they can learn matched grip, if you get them at the right age and it is done right.

There was a comment made by popular instructor during an interview that the reason to play matched grip is to spend less time getting the left hand up to speed and where it should be in relation to the right hand. Do you agree?

I think that the more time needed to spend perfecting the instrument, the better. If it takes more time, then let it happen. The student will learn more through experience and experiment. Time is good, not bad.

It is better for the students in the end. Remember that you are instructing the students for their benefit, not yours.

In the world of marching percussion what are some of the lines that you think is cutting edge or top of the line?

I have always liked Santa Clara Vanguard's drumline. I must say, I am a little disappointed with their switch to matched grip though.

When you sit down to put a piece together (show music, cadence...anything), do you keep the students abilities in mind or do you write and then the student would improve to accomplish the music?

Always have the students in mind. This means you need to push them with their skills. Being an educator, the students always come first, so I will write something they can play, and embellish it to challenge them a little bit. Music does not have to be elaborate and fancy anyway. Embellishing does not need to happen every measure either, just once or twice a piece. If anything, challenge them on their exercises.

When tuning drums, do you tune by ear or do you tune to exact notes?

I go by ear because the weather and atmosphere is always different from place to place. You may hit the note you want, however, drums are more about timbre than pitch.

If you were shipwrecked on an island, what three things would you hope you had with you at the time?

Water, a woman (or two), sticks, pad and metronome (those count as one).

What was the last live performance you went to?

Some of my friends and I had a jazz jam session.

What was your funniest drum corps moment?

I fell in the middle of a 12 count hold in front of a judge. I believe I attempted to step off 3 different times. I guess I was in a hurry to finish the show...

East coast vs. West Coast...Who wins?

None...Midwest prevails over all.

Should there be a cymbal line on the field or do they belong in the pit?

haha...This question is not asked enough. Being a cymbal player in The Colts for three years, I grew to love cymbal lines. I think they are very much needed in drumcorps. In high school however, write the parts in the pit. It is hard to have the time and talent to teach a solid cymbal line. Plus, the cymbals mostly hold for the snares anyway...just have someone play it in the pit. It will be cleaner and more effective.

Any last words??

Anybody can do anything; never hold your students back.

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