

# Lot Patrol



## Mike McIntosh



MIKE BEGAN AS A SAXOPHONE PLAYER AND BEGAN DABBLING IN MARCHING PERCUSSION IN 1985 AS A HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR. HE MARCHED SNARE FOR THE CONCORD BLUE DEVILS IN 1988, 89, AND 90. MIKE ATTENDED THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS AND WAS NAMED THE PAS SNARE INDIVIDUALS CHAMPION IN 1991.

HE HAS TAUGHT THE NITE EXPRESS 1992-1996 WINNING HIGH PERCUSSION AT THE DIVISION II LEVEL IN 1994. HE TAUGHT WITH RALPH HARDIMON AT THE BLUE KNIGHTS IN 1997 AND IS A FORMER PERCUSSION CAPTION HEAD OF THE CAVALIERS.

HIS DAY TO DAY ACTIVITIES INCLUDE COORDINATING THE PERCUSSION FOR THE CARMEL-CLAY SCHOOL DISTRICT IN CARMEL, INDIANA.

HE HAS PERCUSSIVE WORKS PUBLISHED BY THE HAL LEONARD CORPORATION, THE YAMAHA SOUNDS OF SUMMER PROGRAM, TAP-SPACE PUBLICATIONS, DROP-6 MEDIA AND THE ROW-LOFF CORPORATION. MICHAEL CONSULTS/ARRANGES FOR SEVERAL WGI PERCUSSION ENSEMBLES AND IS A SOUGHT AFTER CLINICIAN AND ADJUDICATOR. HE IS A YAMAHA CLINICIAN AS WELL AS A SIGNATURE ARTIST WITH INNOVATIVE PERCUSSION. MICHAEL ALSO ENDORSES EVANS DRUMHEADS, ZILDJIAN CYMBALS, AND LP PERCUSSION. HE LIVES IN BROWNSBURG, INDIANA WITH HIS WIFE JOY, THEIR DOG REX AND TWO CATS, CASPER AND PSYCHO. THIS IS MIKE'S THIRD YEAR AS PERCUSSION DESIGNER/ARRANGER/MUSIC COORDINATOR WITH THE BLUECOATS.

In your video lessons on the Evans website you mention practicing at each tempo for 20 minutes. When you were marching how long did you practice each day? How much time did you spend on each exercise of a specific aspect? How much time to you spend now?

**When I first started playing, I never really had a set schedule. I would pick sticks up constantly...sticks downstairs, sticks in my room, sticks in my car, I loved practicing! When I got serious about playing, I use to bus tables at an O'Charleys restaurant till 11-12 at night. I'd go home, make something to eat then practice ON A DRUM for 4 hours a night in our pool house where I had my drum set up in front of a mirror with the heights drawn on the mirror and a y-axis line (straight up and down) to check my sticks' path of travel. I would spend 3 or 4 nights on a certain rudiment. Tap drags would be Monday-Wednesday, 3's or French rolls would be Thursday-Saturday. I found that I really never had to break many things down again after this part of my practice life. That session between my first year of drum corps and moving to Concord, CA the following year (august 88-january 89) really formed the hands I have today. I rarely practice anymore, when my high school drum line is practicing, I'll play along or try and chop out but I'd say I play less than 20 minutes a week.**

What does Flowus-Foo-Kee-Deehe mean? Where did the name come from? The pattern that appears at the opening and the close of the exercise, did its creation happen in any particular manner?

**Flowus-Foo-Kee-Deehe actually means "Flowers for Kitty." My wife's nickname is Kitty and I based the rhythmic pulse off those syllables...so it's a tribute to her. When the line would play it in the summer and I was away from her, it helped my day by reminding me of my real life. I also liked the way the piece ended down or soft which was a musical effect when the full corps was warming up and the winds and percussion ended their one minute warm-ups very close to each other as the winds ended soft as well.**

The overall score for Bluecoats was the highest score to date. Was the percussion scoring also the highest? What are some of the methods of the staff (percussion/all staff) that achieved this placement? Are these principals necessarily different from other corps?

**The percussion scoring was definitely the highest since I've been involved with the Bluecoats. I think we had a 19.2 (Allentown) in 2005, which was our highest score. Then 06 produced a 19.4, a couple 19.3's. We are blessed with an AMAZING staff at the Bluecoats. I have to give a shout out to my caption head Ray Ulibarri. Ray is an amazing teacher and one of my very best friends as well. Also Tom Rarick, Tim Maynard, Adam Clay, Brad Palmer, Allen Justus, Chad Schaedler, Eric Ridenour and Chris Sakowski....these guys are all as good as it gets!**

**As far as teaching, I learned a LOT about teaching kids after I aged out in 1990. I taught The Nite Express, Blue Knights, The Cavaliers...all complete**

opposites. The Nite Express taught me patience and allowed me to take chances and try new teaching methods out as no one was showing me the ropes. Sometimes learning what NOT to do is more important! I really honed my basic communication skills at NEX and (and met my wife) and the experience was invaluable. The Blue Knights experience exposed me to the musicality of Ralph Hardimon and how he approached individual sound. I love Ralph! At The Cavaliers, I learned from Bret Kuhn, Erik Johnson and John Brennan about how to take things to the next level regarding rehearsal etiquette, efficiency and how to teach and motivate at the highest, most professional level. I've tried to draw something from EVERY experience I've had which allowed me to formulate and teach at the Bluecoats what I think is the best synthesis of everything I've learned so far. I still try and learn things everyday, from the kids I teach, the instructors I have the privilege of being around, the forums I read, the clinicians I am fortunate to see and listen to. Not being afraid to learn and KEEP learning is the key. Times change, kids change, techniques change...when you stagnate, you might miss something.

As far as the approach with the Bluecoats, by the end of the summer, we were literally playing 3 exercises. This is because we've honed the trouble spots of the show down to maybe 2 or 3 muscle combinations. Continuing to play Bluebucks all season does not make sense (at the drum corps level) because we've already established a good accent tap motion/sound by mid summer. By finals, EFFICIENCY is the name of the game. A typical finals week for the Bluecoats entailed the following:

Full drum line stretch (it's important that you take stretch very seriously.) Our section leader would then start playing legato 8<sup>th</sup> notes and everyone would enter at their leisure...the section leader would gradually "move" or change tempo and everyone was responsible for listening and changing with the section leader. So first thing in the morning, we're working on the #1 most important thing in drumming (and in life,) LISTENING. As we would play movable 8's, we would have the drum line move around. They could stretch, change facings, etc. all the while staying "inside the sound" of the person they were responsible for listening to. We would then physically cycle them through ALL the different listening environments in the show...a file, snares in groups of two, tenors in a file, snares rotating a triangle, all members standing on one foot (2<sup>nd</sup> mvmt. skill,) the set from the 2<sup>nd</sup> snare break in the 2<sup>nd</sup> tune...etc. This gets them listening AND reinforces the different environments they are exposed to in the show. 8's would morph into a bit of a hocket or counterpoint tag, which worked legato and marcato motions and get the hands moving a bit. We would then play, in place the last several sets of the opener. This chunk of show music consisted of many meter changes (duple, triple, fivelet base, etc.) We would play the check only, and then through repetition, add ornamentation finally getting to the actual part. This section was the last thing the judge heard in the opener and we wanted it to sparkle through confidence, plus it worked on their hands well as a warm-up AND it made them think. In the end it's all about cleaning one muscle...THE BRAIN!!! We would then play some rolls (endurance) and finally end with large chunks of the book culminating in a musical

run of the show. We would do a quick re-stretch and put the drum line in the drill for an hour before lunch. In the afternoon, we'd stretch, warm-up (using the same philosophy and sequence to build familiarity) augment the process with the virtuosic breaks in the show (tenors break, bass break, snare breaks, etc.) then visually and musically run LARGE chunks only...the whole opener, half the 2<sup>nd</sup> tune, The reason we ran large chunks is because we wanted the "no bar-line" mentality which means we wanted them concentrating on the macro...thinking about the show as one bar of music...one 1,400 over 4 bar and not thinking about every little tap or flam. We wanted them thinking about groove and "moving together." Also, every time we would drum finals week, we'd be in gauntlets and helmets, again trying to minimize the different sensation the uniform or helmet brings in a performance situation.

As far as our "ritual," I'm sure it's different than every other group just as our style and interpretation of music is different and that's OK! At the high school level, to increase efficiency, the drumline and pit warm up together which gets the front ensemble listening and blending immediately. The battery also does box drill to EVERY exercise which gets them marching and playing straight out of the box. The aforementioned techniques allow us to be very efficient and get many things done in a short amount of time.

A person without a percussion instructor or any type of direct guidance, a person with just a book and sticks, can they succeed in drumming and reach a high level of performance?

All I really had were sticks, an old red and blue desk which was my practice pad, an old school metronome and whatever exercises/rudiments I could photocopy. It's all about heart, wanting to succeed and the willingness to look at sacrifice differently. Drumming never seemed like work because I just loved doing it.

A big problem has been sports (baseball) and steroids; will we ever see drumming and steroids?

**I hope so! Kidding, I don't think we need steroids in drumming.**

Is it possible for a person to be an extremely well-versed percussionist, being able to drum on any drum, keys, or anything percussion related? How would a person maintain quality on each instrument, learn additional techniques and basics without letting the others suffer?

**That is the beauty of being a percussionist! Some of my best "snare drummers" at my high school are my best keyboard players...this is the true calling of all percussionists...versatility. Concepts like good practice habits, focusing on tempo control, quality of sound and an open mind will transfer to all instruments.**

A student loves the drum line but doesn't have the slightest interest in the "pit" instruments. What options would be available to them further

down the road when it comes to school and performance? Would it be in their best interest to learn and expand their horizons?

**YES! I went to North Texas as a saxophone player (my high school instrument) and playing timpani and marimba for the first time in college. My snare drum chops got me in the door, after that it was up to me...see previous answer as well. A percussionist that is well versed in all aspects of percussion (drum set, latin, marimba, timpani, accessories) and great time keeping skills garners respect from other musicians from different genres who do not care what the difference is between a hertha and an inverted cheese.**

Would it be beneficial to musicians and the marching percussion arena if there were a "marching percussion" major rather than the standard percussion major that incorporates only traditional percussion?

**Perhaps we're going in that direction, especially with the explosion of popularity with drum lines. You see percussion groups at major sporting events, corporate outings, rock concerts...it's pretty amazing but I think it's safe to say a knowledge of all percussion instruments is still the strongest bet.**

Your past instructors (those who taught you), what are some of the things you still carry with you today? Were there counterproductive ideas that you don't? How would a rookie instructor differentiate between the two, learning what's good for his/her students and what's not? At the same time how would the instructor remain objective and be sure that he/she didn't eliminate a particular aspect of his past education only because he didn't personally like it or found it difficult?

**Past instructors would be Alan Rice, Tom Float, Scott Johnson, Ralph Hardimon, Bret Kuhn, Dave Dombeck, Paul Rennick, Don Click. All have influenced me in some way...you take your past experiences and what you've learned, synthesize that energy with your own spin on things and that crystallizes who you are as a mentor, educator and instructor. Learning to drum teaches you what to say....teaching teaches you what NOT to say. As you get older and wiser, you learn to trust the space a bit! Sometimes the best comment is "Again." Young instructors (I'm guilty at one time) seem to be a bit infatuated with hearing themselves talk. A lengthy dissertation on a "sticks out" can put a group to sleep in a second. The best educators treat education like pushing a raft down a river...a little push here, slight tug there....you never grab and pull and force your will on it. They keep it light, interesting, energized, creative and most of all, FUN!**

Do you teach many private lessons?

**At one time I did. I've since gone back to school to get a degree in theory and composition and my time is extremely limited. I have tried to find qualified people to fulfill that need in my school system.**

Beginners: Teaching the breakdown of time, subdivision, what a "beat" is and/or how the "time" relates to the music. –This seems to be the major hurdle when beginning. Do you have any shortcuts or tricks to teaching/learning initial sight-reading and understanding of time?

**Trying to instill good practice habits and discipline are key factors, which sets the student up for success. Teaching young percussionists to breathe while they play and have a relaxed mind are also key. In a literal sense, putting on music to groove to, teaching rhythms via syllables (e, and, ah can be "banana," one, and ah two can be "strawberry" etc.)**

Percussion and Math –Learning is nothing without retention; everything builds off the previous lesson. How can the ability to retain what was learned be improved?

**A sound, logical approach to things works well. In high school algebra, kids ask, "why am I learning this? I'll never use it!" What they don't understand is while you may not use the Pythagorean Theorem ever again, you WILL use the critical thinking skills you acquired by using a logical sequence to build knowledge. Let's say you want to teach a line to play diddles and rolls in a fivelet skeleton. You would probably start with just playing 16<sup>th</sup>'s accenting the downbeat, e of two, and of 3 and ah of count 4. Then actually have them start feeling the fivelet in the context of one (16<sup>th</sup> base) or two (8<sup>th</sup> note base) beats. Once this has been established, you would then insert diddles emphasizing the importance of not changing hand speed. This way of sequencing goes all the way back to your high school algebra class where what you learned on Monday, you apply to Tuesday, etc.**

In High School, DCI, Marching Percussion in general, Concert Percussion: When it comes to snare – matched or traditional? Pros/Cons to each?

**I like both... (Bluecoats snare line used both last summer.) Traditional grips sets a snare drummer apart in the drum line idiom from the tenor line, hence I seem to gravitate to that grip in a marching percussion setting.**

60's, 70's, 80's, some of the 90's: What were these guys doing wrong? Accent tap, roll exercises, double beat, and cadences lacked "funk." 13 and Ditty were some of the first "groovy" exercises. Now there's Bluebucks, Murray Gusseck's double beat, Regiment's Double/Accent Tap exercise, and hundreds more. Why the change?

**Not necessarily...Fred Sanford's "Flammables" grooved like crazy and was written in the late 70's. Although Thom Hannum's "Monkey Beats" and "Mambo" were groove oriented, I think exercises emphasized "function" over "form" in the 80's. The 90's brought in Kevin Murray's "Ditty," Murray Gusseck's "Martian**

**Mambo” and others which, towards the end of the decade, started to emphasize longer, compositionally based exercises that provided a cool sound-scape for listener and player alike. It’s all-cyclical, the basic strokes in a warm-up setting may one day return! I know Phantom plays some very basic exercises via Paul Rennick and the 06 edition was one of the finest percussion sections I’ve ever heard in a long time.**

Tell me there is “the one” technique for snare, for quads, for bass. In every genre and across genres there are many different ways to bang a drum. In all of those everyone claims to be “the right one,” who’s right?

**No way man! Everyone is right! (Unless your technique produces extreme tension and is not conducive to producing a good sound or creating strokes.) Versatility and the different approaches are the MOST important thing we have. All the different approaches keep the activity very organic and evolutionary based as young instructors take a little of “this” and a little bit of “that” to form there own look and sound. I think that totally rocks!**

**I would like to add one thing.**

**I think any aspiring rudimental percussionists should do all they can to learn. Lead from the “elbow down” (by example,) TALK IS CHEAP! Set yourself for success up by doing the basics first, don’t go on till it’s right, make it SOUND good. Practice with a met, record yourself, perform in front of others. Learn sibellius and finale...write music! Compose, transcribe, learn VDL 2, embrace all styles of drumming, learn who the people that came before you are, learn where Basil, Switzerland is and what it’s about, chop out, drum in the shower, go to drum corps camps, march drum corps, march WGI, check out the parking lot action, LOVE DRUMMING!!!!!!.....**

**I do.**

**Michael McIntosh**

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