

# Lot Patrol



## MURRAY GUSSECK

MURRAY GUSSECK WAS THE PERCUSSION CAPTION HEAD AND ARRANGER FOR THE 6-TIME WORLD CHAMPION SANTA CLARA VANGUARD DRUM & BUGLE CORPS. IN ADDITION TO MARCHING, HE WAS ON STAFF AS A PERCUSSION INSTRUCTOR IN 1994, 1996 THROUGH 1999, AND AGAIN FROM 2002 TO THE PRESENT. DURING THE EARLY 1990'S MURRAY ATTENDED SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY WHERE HE STUDIED WORLD MUSIC SYSTEMS AND DRUMSET. HE HAS TAUGHT AND ARRANGED PERCUSSION MUSIC FOR VARIOUS HIGH SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING AMADOR VALLEY (CA), RICHLAND HILLS (TX), LASSITER (GA), FRED C. BEYER HIGH SCHOOL (CA), AND JAMES LOGAN HIGH SCHOOL (CA). MURRAY IS ALSO A CO-OWNER OF TAPSPACE PUBLICATIONS.

MURRAY ENDORSES PEARL DRUMS, ZILDJIAN GYMBALS, VIC FIRTH DRUMSTICKS, REMO DRUMHEADS, AND XYMOX PRACTICE PADS.

*Visitors to LotPatrol were given the opportunity to submit questions and have them answered by Murray Gusseck. Below are his responses to the selected questions.*

---

Austin Diehl

*"I think that there is a lot of genius behind your writing, especially in exercises like Thirteen, Flammus, Cheezy Poofs, etc. My question is where do you draw your inspiration from when you write? are there any main sources that you look to for ideas?"*

Thank you. I guess I just listen to as many different kinds of music as I can get my hands on and all that goes into the melting pot. As far as exercises, I just try and make something that's fun and interesting to listen to, as well as to play. BTW, Thirteen was written by my friend Curt Moore, of SCV lore. We adapted it slightly when I was teaching, but it's essentially his exercise.

Jason G.  
Illinois

1) *"Where do you get these crazy rhythms from to incorporate into your music writing and what skills/abilities do you use to make them flow from section to section?"*

I spend a lot of time listening to many different kinds of music. The further away from western culture you get, the more interesting and exotic the music sounds, simply because it's not familiar, and wasn't created from the same aesthetic

as what we're used to. Doudou N'diaye Rose, the Bulgarian Women's Choir, Nguyen Le's "Mahgreb & Friends" album, and the Cuban a capella group Vocal Sampling are all examples of some great music from other parts of the world that contain a very different aesthetic than our own American music. There's plenty of great American music as well, obviously, but since most of us are saturated with a lot of that, I find that it helps to go outside of that as much as I can.

The second part of your question has to do with what I think of as "rhythmic voice leading." If the individual sections can be written for in such a way that one section points the listener's ear to another, it helps to smooth out the whole thing. If you think of the whole battery section as an instrument, it will have holistic integrity. And inside of this, if each subsection's parts are sensible and melodic from both a playing and listening standpoint, that's another layer of interest. There are many fine writers that I think exemplify this much better than myself. Two of my favorites are Ralph Hardimon and Jim Casella, but there are others to be sure.

2) *"What could you possibly see improving with the SCV line from playing matched grip?"*

Ah, yes, the matched grip question. I guess I just didn't want to spend as much time trying to get the same sound out of the left hand. I enjoy and use both grips myself. I grew up as a matched grip player and later taught myself the traditional grip by studying great players and trying to emulate what they could do. I don't really consider the grip issue to be paramount to a drumline's success, even though I think many people thought that last year's SCV line suffered due to the grip change. I don't believe that to be the case, but that kind of negative energy is part of why I had to take a break from it. A grip is a grip is a grip...it's what you do with it that counts.

3) *"Can you give your explanation of Moeller Technique because I see it all the time, that fluidity in your lines playing, and could this have been a reason for moving to matched grip?"*

I'm currently trying to learn the Moeller stroke myself, so if I figure it out, I can let you know. The techniques that I taught at SCV were the result of my own explorations into the art of playing drums, and branched off of experiences with some of my own teachers like Glen Crosby, Ralph Hardimon, Greg Van Winkle, and Curt Moore. Also, I study more drumset players than rudimental players so I guess that's a big part of the reason why there's more of a smoothness to the approach.

4) *"What ever happened to Orwa? That was another great cadence I have heard that just disappeared and the music for it has disappeared as well."*

Orawa is a piece of music for 15 strings by Wojciech Kilar. It was used by SCV in 2003 as opener and closer of the show, arranged for percussion by my friend Jim Casella. As far as I know, it still exists, but you might have to buy the DVD or CD to hear it :)

5) *"What kind of practice regiment does the great Murray Gusseck himself go through?"*

Not a consistent enough one, that's for sure! A lot of the exercises that I go through are straight from, or variations of, exercises I developed for SCV. You can find some of them through Tapspace (<http://www.tapspace.com/>)...shameless plug...I also try and do a lot of independence exercises. There are so many great books on this I don't even know where to begin. Hudson music has some great DVD's out. I think one by Jeff Queen just got released...I'm sure there are some great tips in there. I love the Steve Smith one "Drumset Technique and History of the U.S. Beat." Ted Reed's book Syncopation, and Gary Chester's New Breed are other classic examples, to name a couple.

6) *"Tenors or Snares? That is the question."*

I'm sorry, what was the question?

7) *"Any tips for the modern drummer?"*

Try and get some regular walking in.

8) *"Is it really pain or no gain or contrary to popular belief that you can play and get better without feeling the burn?"*

I go back and forth. I guess I feel that most playing benefits from elongated, stretched muscles. This is only possible when one is relaxed. But for faster more intricate patterns you definitely need the higher pressures from the smaller muscles in the hands. I think the balance between the two is where it's at, and even if I'm targeting the smaller muscles, I try not to burn myself out too much. Do a lot of experimenting and see what works best for you.

9) *"WHY DID YOU LEAVE SCV? They wont ever be the same..."*

Thank you. I'm sure they'll be fine, albeit different as is expected under any regime change. There are still a lot of core SCV folks there, like Robert Chavira, Kent Cater, Jon Steele, Nate Bourg, etc, so it's not like it's all brand new. I wish them all the success they deserve, especially after the pounding we took last year. I left for several reasons. Partly because I wanted to play more, partly because I needed a break, partly because I got burned out after all the negative energy that surrounded last year's drumline, which, by the way, went from zero to hero in my book by the end of the season.

10) "My band is a show style band and being that we use straps instead of harnesses (which really messes up our playing lots not to mention the line sucks to begin with) and we wear our drums practically to our knees. Is this good practice, as well as we don't have leg rests so the drum just screws over our knees, to wear our drums so low that we have to use so much freaking arm and bend over the drum to play? Also we play matched grip with a stupid tilt, not the way the tilt should be, and this also screws everyone's playing up."

Showbands are cool. Maybe you could shorten the straps. Whatever your conditions bring heart to the gig and you'll play great.

11) *"Can you tell us some brief history on your playing/teaching in the percussion industry?"*

I started playing drums in high school. Before that I played alto sax, and before that, piano and violin. None of them seriously, however. It wasn't until I saw my high school's drumline that I became attached to that whole thing. I played bass drum and tenor drums in high school under the direction of Greg Van Winkle, and then tenors up at SCV from 1988-1992 under Ralph Hardimon, Glen Crosby, Scott Johnson, and others. I taught in 1994, and then again from 1996-1999, and then again from 2002-2005. I was the caption head in 2003-2005. Many of my teaching years were partnerships with Jim Casella.

12) *"After leaving SCV, what will be your pursuits in the area of percussion? Meaning, are you going to continue teaching or this is the end of your percussion life?"*

Bettering my own playing. I have moved to Vancouver, WA, where I now teach at Evergreen HS, and I am also looking to play more in the Portland area. I'm doing some small time with the Capital Regiment crew this year (I have friends there, as well as former students teaching), so that should be fun. Also, Ralph Hardimon is writing the book. Listening to his music is what got me hooked into drum corps from early on, so it brings back a lot of memories. Also, Tapspace is located in Portland, OR, so I am now closer to that, which is nice.

13) *"Who were your idols in the world of percussion when you were a growing/aspiring percussionist back in the day?"*

Well, I'm still a growing and aspiring (and sometimes perspiring) percussionist. My idols have been, in absolutely no certain order, Greg Van Winkle, Neil Peart, Dave Weckl, Glen Crosby, Ralph Hardimon, Steve Gadd, Jim Casella, Royal Hartigan, Doudou N'diaye Rose, Karim Ziad, Vinnie Colaiuta, Peter Erskine, Steve Smith, Mike Portnoy, Lars Ulrich, Scott Johnson, the SCV drumlines of the past few years, Pat Metheny, Mike Stern, John Abercrombie, Eric Whitacre, Horacio Hernandez, Vinnie Appice, Manu Katche, Steve Jordan, Buddy Rich, Dennis Chambers, and a whole lot of others.

14) *"How old are you and how long have you been involved in percussion?"*

35, and I've been playing drums since I was 15.

15) *"Finally, I haven't ever seen you, Murray Gusseck, play any drums before, just heard you music and such. Know where I can find some videos or just audio of you playing an instrument yourself?"*

I'm working on a website where I can post some clips and some video, but it's not done just yet. There's a band on the iTunes store called "Nima & Merge" (used to be called Merge), and I played on their first recording, listed on iTunes as just "debut CD." It's the purple one.

Mariël

Holland

Performing:

Showband De Wilp (Tenorline)

Showband Rhythm Stars (Bassline)

*"Why did you start writing fun and good sounding excersizes like Double Beat, and not simple short excersizes? Double Beat sounds to me just like a great cadence or something, but it is 'just' an excersize. When and why did you start to make such good sounding stuff?"*

Thank you. I started writing in 1990, just because it seemed like a good idea at the time. We needed a cadence so I wrote what has since been called Electric Wheelchair. I also wrote Martian Mambo based on some rhythms in an etude by Mitchell Peters from his advanced snare drum studies book.

Jon

*"Can you teach my old high school's drumline one day?"*

Thanks for the thought dude. What are the hours?

Ryan Moore

Suwanne, Georgia, Collins Hill High School

*"As I listen to the music that drum corps percussion arrangers write, I always wonder, "How did they think to write that?" I hear things such as five's accented on the off beats, and crazy percussion features and always wonder "Man, I wish I could think up music like that?"*

*How do you generally come up with the music that you write?"*

You just do. It's all a product of who YOU are at that particular point in time.

Benn Breeden

Sykesville, MD

*"If the reason isn't too personal, why did you leave SCV so suddenly? Vanguard doesn't sound like Vanguard anymore without you or Jim Casella. Do you ever see yourself returning to Santa Clara? Thanks!"*

Thanks for the kind words, but I have faith that the corps will do just fine. They were there before me or Jim, and they'll be there long after. It will be different for sure, but that is to be expected. People shouldn't automatically associate different with bad. As far as returning, hard to predict the future like that.

Hunter Stricklin

*"I would like to know what your take is on the despotic utopias' that spawned from such totalitarian leaders as Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini pre-World War II."*

Hope you get an 'A' :)

Matt

*"What have been some of your greatest inspirations that have allowed you to create such a unique sound, which is a beautiful blend of musicality as well as things that are fun to play that have a groove?"*

Thanks for the great compliment. Knowing what constitutes a groove is an important part of writing one...sounds obvious but a genuine groove is still rather uncommon in a lot of writing that I hear (including myself). The things that help me with this are playing more (outside of drum corps), and listening more (outside of drum corps). I say outside of drum corps because the activity tends to feed into itself artistically speaking, and, as they say, cross-breeding is good for the gene code.

Musicality is such a subjective word; I think if I can write in such a way that someone listening feels what I want them to feel, then that's a way of communicating, and that's what I think music essentially is...an emotional language. If this is your goal, all you need is an outlet to practice it. I feel very blessed to have had such an outlet with SCV.

Jeff Neuser

*"Murray, I was wondering why you left SCV? Also, what is the advice you have for future drum corps and/or indoor drumline drummers? And, what is some good advice you have for ones to get better- maybe to ensure their drumline/percussion future? Thanks."*

Well, I've already touched on the leaving SCV issue, so I'll default to the next bit. As far as advice for future drummers, I don't really have anything specific to say to so general an inquiry. Oh, wait, I do...WEAR EARPLUGS. Don't ruin your ears like I have. Also, check some yoga out every now and then...it's great. I only dabble but it's been very helpful for all kinds of reasons. Both of these tips will help ensure your percussion future.

Torey Riser  
Greenwood, SC

*"I was having a discussion with a few other percussion instructors from SC a few days ago on 'match vs traditional.'*

*We got into an in depth discussion on why they believe match is "easier" and more "physically" appropriate for marching snare drum. I don't necessarily agree, which makes me wonder if match is "easier and more physically appropriate" (equality between hands, more relaxed, specific muscle use, etc), why do 95% of DCI snare lines play traditional?*

*I understand it was adapted for the tilted drums, but it would have been just as easy to switch back to match. Can one pose the argument that it "just looks better"? Is match "easier"? Can anything played match be played traditional with the same level of execution?*

*Or is it that they are equal, and it just depends on how well you execute the grip you are playing?*

*Thanks."*

It's OK to be different. The reason most drum corps lines play traditional is because THEY prefer to play traditional. People like the grip...it's cool. It looks cool and feels good to play. What looks even cooler to me is seeing a group of drummers that really know how to play a drum, no matter what grip they use. If there's some slammin' playing, I wouldn't care what grip they were using. The funniest thing to me about the whole matched/traditional debacle that it's turned into is that the decision was made in about 5 seconds one night on a gut instinct that could definitely be likened to a whim, albeit one with rationale behind it. Nevertheless, it caused uproar. That's hilarious.

Scott

Ohio

*"Other than working on some Tapspace things, what will you be doing or who will you be working with in the future? Anybody this summer or next season?"*

A little bit with Capital Regiment, and digging into some technique stuff with Evergreen HS, my new high school gig up in Vancouver.

Marvin Lewis

Cincinnati, Ohio

*"Not necessarily in your situation with SCV but there are a lot of instructors that instill in their members that there should be a certain level of dedication to a corps, that you should start there and end there. Is it important to be loyal to the corps or is it alright to hop from corps to corps? The reason I ask is that I have seen many instructors harp on this subject only to leave a season or two later. Are they all saying this as some kind of a "mind trick" or team building "thing?"*

I've been on both sides of that coin. Ultimately if someone doesn't want to be a part of something, it's insanity to insist that they should stay. As an instructor I've tried to create an environment that people can have fun and feel successful in. If I'm successful myself in doing so, the corps hopping doesn't tend to happen as much, or at all.

Kristina

Indiana

*"What did you have for breakfast this morning? Or are you one of those "I'm too busy to eat breakfast" type of people?"*

I had one of those low fat blueberry Starbucks units and some coffee. It was tasty. Mmmmmmm....

Travis

Illini

*"What's an average day for you? When you're not on tour what are you doing? What kind of car do you drive?"*

Don't seem to have too many typical days. Get up, suck down some coffee, do email, walk the dog, exercise, then whatever tasks I have on hand that day. More practicing and playing would be a desire of mine. I drive a soccer mom mini-van. Because I like it.

Chris R.

PA

*"This whole east vs. west vs. midwest contest. You're probably all for the West? When you were marching were people still trying to say that corps had various ways of doing things based on the region where they were based?"*

*How have some other things changed since you marched?"*

I don't really think it matters where a corps comes from. Never did. I'm from the west, and I liked SCV, so that worked out decently enough. I like a lot of what other groups are doing. Other things that have changed? That's probably more of a question for a drum corps aficionado, which I am definitely not.

Jake

Evansville, Indiana

*"Where do you go on vacation? Here we go some place warm but you already live there. Do you pay money to go where the snow is??"*

I live in Vancouver, WA now, and we had about 90 days of straight rain when I first moved here. I guess I could go to Mt Hood to see the snow up there.

Nah, I'll stay in and watch South Park.

"Anonymous Drum Corps Person"

TX

*"Have you ever made a grilled cheese sandwich using an iron? What is the most hobo-like thing you've ever done?"*

No, but that's a great idea. I saw it on Benny & Joon. Most hobo-like thing I've ever done? Maybe one night in NYC with some friends after one of "those" nights when I passed out on top of a car. That was rather hobo-esque.

Greg

Texas!! woot!

*"What was your last run in with the law? As a kid were you a trouble maker? Spend much time in the principals office?"*

I shot the sheriff.

But I did not shoot the deputy.

.

Wes Lloyd

Cincinnati

*"How do YOU explain drum corps to people? The best answer I ever had was to compare the activity to STOMP, only because everyone knows what it is and just about everybody thinks it's cool. How can you tell them what it is without thinking that you're possibly a band nerd?"*

*What was the worst job you've ever had?"*

If I'm trying to explain drum corps to someone who doesn't already know about it, I usually say it's like a big marching band without flutes. No way to avoid the band nerd scenario. Because, let's face it, we ARE band nerds. If it's really problematic for you, you could always use the "band nerds on steroids" nomenclature, for the extra tough guy points. Worst job ever? Working for an insurance company. Pretty bleak.

Steve

Batesville, IN

*"Finish this statement-> 3.1 4 1 \_\_"*

5 9

Rod Campbell

Michigan

*"Judge Judy, Judge Mathis, or Judge Wapner?"*

Judge Dredd

Mark Gibson

Ontario

*"Do you have a technique book or anything available or an SCV technique book? I wanted to work with my drum tilted to max out my left-hand (I don't have a lot of height past creating a right angle). How much tilt is too much tilt? Did you guys play with your drums tilted so that you want have to throw your left hand back as much as if the drum was flat? Can you define the drum height, hand placements, and stick positions a little?"*

Jim Casella and I have some books available through our company TapSPACE Publications (<http://www.tapSPACE.com/>). One is called Fresh Perspectives and the other is Parking Lot Etudes. Fresh Perspectives in particular was a look at our core approach to technique and music with the drumlines of the late 90's at SCV. As for

drum tilts and all that, I can't really remember any measurements. We just eyed it. The reason for that was because it felt a little more ergonomic. No big deal though. That's another example of one of those little things (and I don't remember who came up with the plan to tilt the snares at SCV...might have been myself, although I think it might have been Dave Reeves or Chip Webster actually) that we did for almost arbitrary reasons that caused an uproar. Now it seems to be commonplace, so other people are ostensibly finding benefits for themselves with it.

Alex

Evansville, Indiana

*"There are a lot of people who try or who are trying to make it in the music business, marching percussion would probably be even tougher, it's coming more and more into mainstream media or pop culture, but it's still not vastly known.*

*With Tapspace, or just generally speaking, how can a person go about supporting themselves on marching percussion? At what point does it go from a second job to your only job that's supporting you 100%?"*

When I find out how to support myself in this activity, I can definitely let you know! I'm still kickin' & scratchin'. Anyway you slice it, you're going to have to have a few different irons in the fire. I still believe in the mantra "Do what you love and the money will follow." I'm just waiting for the money part.

Kim

Earth

*"If drum corps are non-profits and DCI is non-profit, why does it cost so much for people to march? Why does DCI merch cost so much?"*

It costs to march because it is expensive for corps organizations to go on the road, feed all the people, pay staff, insure the members and staff, and on and on. Not mention gas prices now. I wouldn't be surprised if it was literally hundreds of thousands of dollars for fuel for a typical drum corps convoy for one season. Most show sponsors are probably looking just to break even rather than raking in ticket sale profits. It's an under-exposed activity still (although there seems to be some positive movement lately) so it doesn't just pay for itself, at least not yet. And much of the money that drum corps' make for themselves to survive comes from the merchandise side of things.

Bill

East Lafayette

*"What are your thoughts on drum corps and amplification? To you, does it make a difference if it's an instrument or a voice being amplified? At what point does drum corps become a large marching band?"*

I go back and forth. It is certainly a pain in the butt to deal with, but if it's done well, it makes the listening enjoyment greater. At what point does a drum corps become a large marching band? Definitely when there are flutes on the field.

Paul  
Indiana  
*"Star Trek or Star Wars?"*

Empire Strikes Back.

Brian  
NJ  
*"What's the last movie you've seen? What did you think about it? What's the worst movie you've ever seen?"*

I saw about 45 minutes of Poseidon, then had to walk out. Worst movie? I think that would have to be Bush landing on an aircraft carrier.

Byron  
Seattle  
*"What did you think of the movie Drumline?"*  
I didn't see that one.

Alex  
Indiana  
*"How important are the standard rudiments? Were they used more in drum corps when you marched? Is there a reason everyone has broken away from them now or that they've created additional rudiments and all the hybrids?"*

When I marched people were saying the same thing. Namely, that no one uses the standard rudiments anymore. I'm definitely not the foremost authority on the subject, but I know and can use the basic ones, like rolls, flams, paradiddles, and drags. Many others are just combinations of these, and there are a lot of folks who are way more knowledgeable about it than I am. I tend to use rudiments that I can manipulate rhythmically, rather than as just arbitrary note combinations and groupings. And I don't think that everyone has broken away...I think there are many out there that still practice all their rudiments and carry on the tradition of rudimental percussion. I'm not sure I'm one of them, as that's not how I interpret what I do, but they're there.

Links of interest:

<http://www.TapSpace.com>



*Zildjian*



**LRL**  
**RLR**

[LotPatrol.com](http://LotPatrol.com)

© 2006 [LotPatrol.com](http://LotPatrol.com)