

Perspectives  
*of*  
Percussion Pedagogues



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*Foreword by,*

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Volume II

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# Foreword

Volume Two of *Perspectives of Percussion Pedagogues* is a continuation of Dr. Domenico E. Zarro's ongoing project to compile and publish the career stories of important percussion pedagogues as reported in their own words. Percussion performance practices and values are in a golden age at two-and-a-half decades into the 21st Century. The global internet has sparked a growing world-wide interest in percussion performance, not only as it relates to American and European genres of music: classical, jazz, pop, folk, rock, soul, and more. But also non-western genres: African (Ghanaian, Ugandan, Zimbabwean, etc.), North and South Indian, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, Brazilian, Mexican, and much more.

For percussion students who are either considering, or pursuing a career in music, finding one's path to their goal can be daunting. Regardless of the musical genre that inspires a student's interest, the route one takes usually involves at least some formal study under a genre-specific teacher or mentor. Those students who have such a foundation, may also acquire a college degree. However, even if one has graduated from college, the way forward may still be uncertain. In contrast to clearly defined traditional avenues followed by previous generations, access into today's wide variety of possible music careers has increasingly become hybridized - requiring both traditional and individually self-constructed steps.

Finding or creating one's own course is just one of a number of topics that this volume seeks to address by posing questions directly to the subjects interviewed. Their responses reveal how they resolved such issues, and they also provide advice to students now that they are professional teachers and performers.



William L. Cahn

Principal Percussionist, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra (1968 to 1995)

Founding Member, NEXUS (1971 to present)

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# Chapter 14



William Moersch

*March, 2023*

A recipient of the prestigious Percussive Arts Society's Lifetime Achievement in Education Award, and a member of its Hall of Fame, William Moersch is also a Professor Emeritus of Percussion at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Prior to his appointment at the University of Illinois, he created the graduate degree programs in marimba performance at the Peabody Conservatory, and Rutgers University. He is also the Artistic Director of New Music Marimba, a member of the Percussive Arts Society's Board of Advisors, an Artist Endorser for Pearl Drums/Adams Percussion, SABIAN cymbals, Grover Pro Percussion, Innovative Percussion mallets, a regularly featured artist at international percussion festivals, and has presented master classes throughout the world.

The first marimbist ever to receive a National Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalist Fellowship, and be honored by N.E.A. Recording and Consortium Commissioning Grants, Mr. Moersch is also an international marimba virtuoso who has performed on more than seventy-five recordings. He is perhaps best known for commissioning much of the prominent modern repertoire for marimba from composers such as: Irwin Bazelon, Richard Rodney Bennett, Martin Bresnick, Jacob Druckman, Eric Ewazen, David Lang, Paul Lansky, Libby Larsen, Steven Mackey, Akemi Naito, Roger Reynolds, Gunther Schuller, Joseph Schwantner, John Serry, Andrew Thomas, Alejandro Viñao, James Wood, and Charles Wuorinen.

Currently, Mr. Moersch is Principal Timpanist of Sinfonia da Camera and the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra, and has appeared as a soloist with symphonic orchestras and recitals throughout the world. He has also performed with the American Symphony, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the New Jersey Symphony, the New York Chamber Symphony, the New York City Opera Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, on numerous motion picture soundtracks, and as a featured soloist in the New York Shakespeare Festival's Broadway production of *The Pirates of Penzance*.



*When did you begin studying music?*

In fifth grade I watched my two best friends get to leave class each week to take drum lessons and thought, *That looks like a good idea!* So I started in sixth grade where I worked in a group of four on basic snare drum technique using a rubber

practice pad. However, after that first drum class, I began regular private lessons and kept at it. By high school, I was very good at snare drum, and then added vibraphone and marimba.

*Did you always study percussion?*

Yes, although in college I took a year of class piano, a year of class jazz piano, and one semester of flute.

*Who were your primary teachers?*

Jerry Hartweg (before high school), Edward J. Downing & Gary Cook (high school), and Charles Owen & Barry Jekowski (college and briefly after).

*When did you decide to pursue a career in music?*

In high school I was a shy only child, and music gave me a way to express myself and have other people notice me. I thought I would give music a try in college for a year and then transfer to an East Coast Conservatory. However, as it turned out, Charles Owen retired from the Philadelphia Orchestra and started teaching at Michigan my freshman year, so I stayed there.

*Did you have a specific goal?*

I knew that I wanted to perform and had no interest in teaching. At the end of my senior year in high school, I won two concerto competitions as a marimba soloist and decided, “This is what I want to do for the rest of my life, be a marimba soloist with orchestras!” Shortly thereafter, I learned that the entire marimba repertoire consisted of three concerti, a few etudes, and some transcriptions. I made a trial detour into jazz vibes, but then returned to solo marimba, percussion in chamber music, and orchestral percussion. I enjoyed playing in orchestras, but I didn’t want to audition for an orchestra; my primary interests were in solo marimba and contemporary music (now known as *new music*). In one lesson, Charles Owen said to me, “If you want to make a living in contemporary music, you’ll have to move to New York City.” After initially thinking, *I’ll never move to New York*, a year or two later, I did.

*Who impacted your musical growth the most?*

A very tough call! If I reword the question to, “Who or what impacted your musical growth the most?” I would say that Charles Owen was the individual that had the greatest impact. Charlie gave me the Philadelphia Orchestra focus on sound, on rich, dark tone quality and impeccable phrasing in every kind of music.

# Chapter 19



Neil W. Grover

*October, 2023*

A member of the Percussive Arts Society's Hall of Fame, Neil W. Grover is an accomplished music educator, author, composer, and former Chair of the Percussion Programs at both The Boston Conservatory, and the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He is probably best known as the founder of Grover Pro Percussion Inc., where his innovative designs and cutting-edge manufacturing techniques have set a new standard for the ergonomic functionality of modern day percussion instruments. He and his company have been featured in many publications including: *Percussive Notes*, *Modern Drummer*, *School Band & Orchestra*, *Musical Merchandise Review* and on two episodes of the Discovery Channel's series *How It's Made*. Mr. Grover has written and/or co-authored five publications: *Four Mallet Primer*, *Four Mallet Fundamentals*, *Art of Triangle & Tambourine Playing*, *Percussionist's Cookbook*, and *The Art of Percussion Playing*, all published by Meredith Music. He has also written articles for *School Band & Orchestra*, *Percussive Notes*, and *Drum Tracks*.

As one of the field's most prolific and requested clinicians, he has given presentations at over 100 colleges and universities throughout the USA and Canada. He is equally in demand overseas having led master classes at such venerable institutions as the Sydney Conservatory, Conservatoire de Paris, London's Royal College of Music & Guildhall School, Royal Northern College of Music, Royal Conservatory, as well as throughout Japan, Korea, and Europe. Mr. Grover has been an invited clinician at over 50 state and international days of percussion, including the Texas Music Educators Association Conference, Midwest Band and Orchestra Conference, Iowa Bandmasters Convention, and to five the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions. Moreover, he has served on the Board of Directors of the Percussive Arts Society, as well as the Winchester Community Music School, which is one of America's top community music schools.

At the young age of 23, Mr. Grover was appointed Principal Percussionist of the Opera Company of Boston, a position he held for seven seasons. As his career progressed, he found himself in demand for all musical genres including symphony, chamber music, ballet, opera, and commercial recordings. Highlights of his collaborations include the Royal Ballet, Bolshoi Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Music from Marlboro, Indianapolis Symphony, Boston Musica Viva, and the Empire Brass. He was chosen to record the percussion tracks for Phillip Glass' film soundtrack for *Mishima*. In addition, Neil appears as a Boston Pops percussionist in

the hit movie *Blown Away* starring Jeff Bridges and Tommy Lee Jones. He has toured with Music From Marlboro, Boston Symphony, Henry Mancini, Boston Symphony Chamber Players, and the Broadway production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. Since 1977 he has performed, recorded and toured with the world-famous Boston Pops, where he has made music under the batons of Maestros Arthur Fiedler, John Williams, and Keith Lockhart.

Having performed regularly in the percussion section of the Boston Symphony for over 35 years, he has worked with Maestros Seiji Ozawa, James Levine, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Colin Davis, Charles Dutoit, Neemi Jaarvi, Rafael Fruhbeck de Burgos, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Bernard Haitink. It is noteworthy that Mr. Grover has performed in over 1,500 concerts as a percussionist with the BSO & Boston Pops.

His percussive talents have been heard by thousands at renown venues such as Boston's Symphony Hall, Carnegie Hall, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, festivals at Tanglewood, Hollywood Bowl, Wolf Trap, Blossom, and Ravinia. In addition, he has performed for millions of listeners through television and radio broadcasts on the NBC, CBS, NHK, PBS, A&E, and NPR networks. And at the request of composer John Williams, Mr. Grover joined the multimedia musical extravaganza, *Star Wars In Concert*, serving as Principal Percussionist on two legs of their North American Tour. He also holds the distinction of performing on the soundtrack for one of the most successful blockbuster movies of all time: *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, as well as with the iconic rock band Aerosmith.



*When did you begin studying music?*

I began studying formally at nine, but since my father's a great jazz musician, I grew up always listening to lots of great music.

*Did you always study percussion?*

I always studied drums and percussion, and in high school I also got very involved in composing.

*What made you choose percussion?*

I saw the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show in 1964 and liked Ringo Starr. But when I was 15, an older friend played me a recording of Varese's *Ionization*, and I was hooked on percussion!

*Who were your primary teachers?*

They were Ronnie Benedict, Joseph Castka, Robert McCormick, and Vic Firth.

*When did you decide to pursue a career in music?*

In my sophomore year in high school.

*Did you have a specific goal?*

My goal has always been to make a living in music, whatever form that takes. I never wanted to limit myself to just one specific musical goal. More importantly, I strove to live a good life, and be happy.

*Do you focus on a specific area of percussion?*

I am a believer in the old *Total Percussion* concept: to play instruments across the full range of the percussion family. My career took me on a path that involved a focus on playing cymbals and percussion accessories; often a percussionist's focus is dictated not by the player, but by the opportunity.

*Who impacted your musical growth the most?*

As the saying goes, *It takes a village*. In addition to the wonderful teachers I previously mentioned, my father has been a huge influence, and was instrumental in my early development as a musician.

*What teaching positions have you held?*

I have taught at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, where I served as the Percussion Department Chairman; and Boston Conservatory where I served as the Head of the Percussion Program.

*What percussionists have inspired you the most?*

Vic Firth was the most inspirational percussionist I have known. He was not only one of the world's foremost players, but he was a wonderful teacher, mentor, and colleague.

*Is there a specific genre you enjoy performing the most?*

Not really. I find great satisfaction in moving between various genres of music.