

THE ANCIENT RUDIMENTAL DRUM by Dr. Richard D. Ruquist

1 Ancient Fife and Drum

Ancient fife and drum is a form of music unique to the United States. It was developed in Connecticut in the late 1800's by civilian fife and drum corps and it continues to be developed today throughout eastern United States. An ancient fife and drum corps appears in the dress of the colonial or revolutionary period and consists of;

- i. the cylindrical, six hole, keyless fife
- ii. the rudimental, rope tensioned, snare drum
- iii. the rudimental, rope tensioned, double stick bass drum

Other forms of percussion are not permitted.

The "Ancients" main feature that distinguished it from other marching units is its solid, dynamic sound. The heavy, solid sound is achieved by playing the double stick (two wooden mallets) bass drum in unison with the snare drum at a slow cadence of 90 to 110 beats per minute. Except for the double stroke rolls and grace notes, the bass drummer plays everything the snare drummer plays. The heavy solid sound is enhanced by the use of a very heavy open style of snare drumming.

The dynamic sound is achieved by a proper balance of fifes, snare, and bass drums and by always playing the drums so as to support the fife music. Thus the drumming is characterized by very loud and very soft drumming or "shading". Whether played loudly or shaded, the drum rudiments are always strongly accented, so as to support the accents in the fife music. Proper balance may usually be achieved by an equal number of snare and bass drummers and an equal number of strong fifers, i.e. the number of fifers should equal or exceed the total number of drummers. The solid dynamic sound is greatly enhanced when every drummer plays so precisely that every tap, including double stroke rolls, may be distinguished.

The music played by the "Ancients" is somewhat old and somewhat standardized so that when several Ancient corps gather at musters and parades, they may all play together. Thus an important aspect of ancient fife and drum is participation in informal jam sessions or jollification. Jam sessions serve as the principal means to teach and spread ancient rudimental drumming and fifing.

2 The Drum Rudiments

Rudimental drumming consists of the performance of a series of musical patterns or "rudiments". Although as many as a hundred may exist, drum music has been standardized into twenty-six rudiments. Some of the more important rudiments are:

- single stroke roll
- double stroke roll
- flam
- seven stroke roll
- fifteen stroke roll
- flam paradiddle
- flamacue
- flam accent
- lesson 25 or prepatioe
- seven-single stroke roll or sextuplet or fill

Actually the ancient rudimental snare drummer can only strike the drum in three basic ways:

- i. single strokes
- ii. double strokes
- iii. flams (two simultaneous strokes)

It is traditional always to strike the flam so that one stick just taps the drum head from an inch height as the other takes the full stroke. All of the above rudiments are just combinations of these three basic rudiments, either accented or unaccented. The rudimental bass drummer essentially only plays single stroke rolls, although very open double stroke rolls may be used to enhance style.

It follows that the proficiency of the ancient rudimental drummer is determined by his ability to play the three basic rudiments, in particular, the single and double stroke rolls.

3 The Technique of Rudimental Snare Drumming

Ancient rudimental snare drumming is similar to other forms of rudimental drumming with some small deviations. Heavy drum sticks are normally employed and the drumming is performed by wrist and arm movements rather than finger movements. An elbow movement is required for each stroke and the wrist is moved in a rotary motion rather than a breaking motion, with the pivot point of the drumming motion being in the wrist rather than on the stick or hand. Drumming with the right stick, hand, and arm should be as symmetrical as possible with the left stick, hand, and arm. The hands and arms should be as relaxed as possible with very little finger pressure on the sticks. (except perhaps for strong accents) so that the sticks bounce of their own accord.

There are four positions or heights used in ancient rudimental snare drumming:

- i. the highest is only used to initiate the playing of a long roll by first playing it slowly and then closing it down; in this position the sticks are held vertically with the hands at shoulder level and out over the drum
- ii. in the stroke position the hands are not raised but the wrists and arms rotate until the sticks make a 45 degree angle with the horizontal; rolls, flams, and single stroke accents are played from this position
- iii. in the tap position the sticks are raised no more than four inches off the drumhead; unaccented single strokes, double strokes in paradiddles and double strokes in ruffs are played in this position; good style is achieved when there is as much visible contrast between the stroke and tap position as possible
- iv. in the flam grace note position, the grace note stick is raised no more than one inch from the drumhead; in execution the drumhead is merely touched

Loud or "ff" drumming is performed in the above stroke, tap, and grace note positions. Soft or "pp" drumming (shading) is performed by playing rolls, flams, and accents in the tap position, and all other beats in the grace note position. Ancient rudimental drumming is played either loud or soft with very little gradation in between. Flams, unless accented, are always slightly softer than accented beats. Sometimes entire sections of music are shaded, but often rolls and accents are played loudly with all other beats played softly.

4 The Technique of Rudimental Bass Drumming

Ancient rudimental bass drumming is very similar to snare drumming except that it is done on vertical surfaces. Grace notes are not played but there are stroke and tap positions. In the tap position the hand is

not moved from the drumhead and only the wrist and arm are rotated in striking the beat in a manner quite similar to the stroke on a snare drum. In the stroke position, the hand and arm are raised and brought away from the drumhead with a flourish until the drum stick is vertical and the hands are at shoulder level as in the highest snare drum position. The stroke is executed from this position starting with an arm motion and ending with a snap of the wrists. The bass drummer should have a noticeable arm swing in playing alternate single or double strokes.

Flams are usually played as open double stroke rolls from the stroke position on the bass drum. Accents are also played from the stroke position. All other beats are played from the tap position. Rolls and grace notes are not played on the bass drum except for the accented beats in such rudiments.