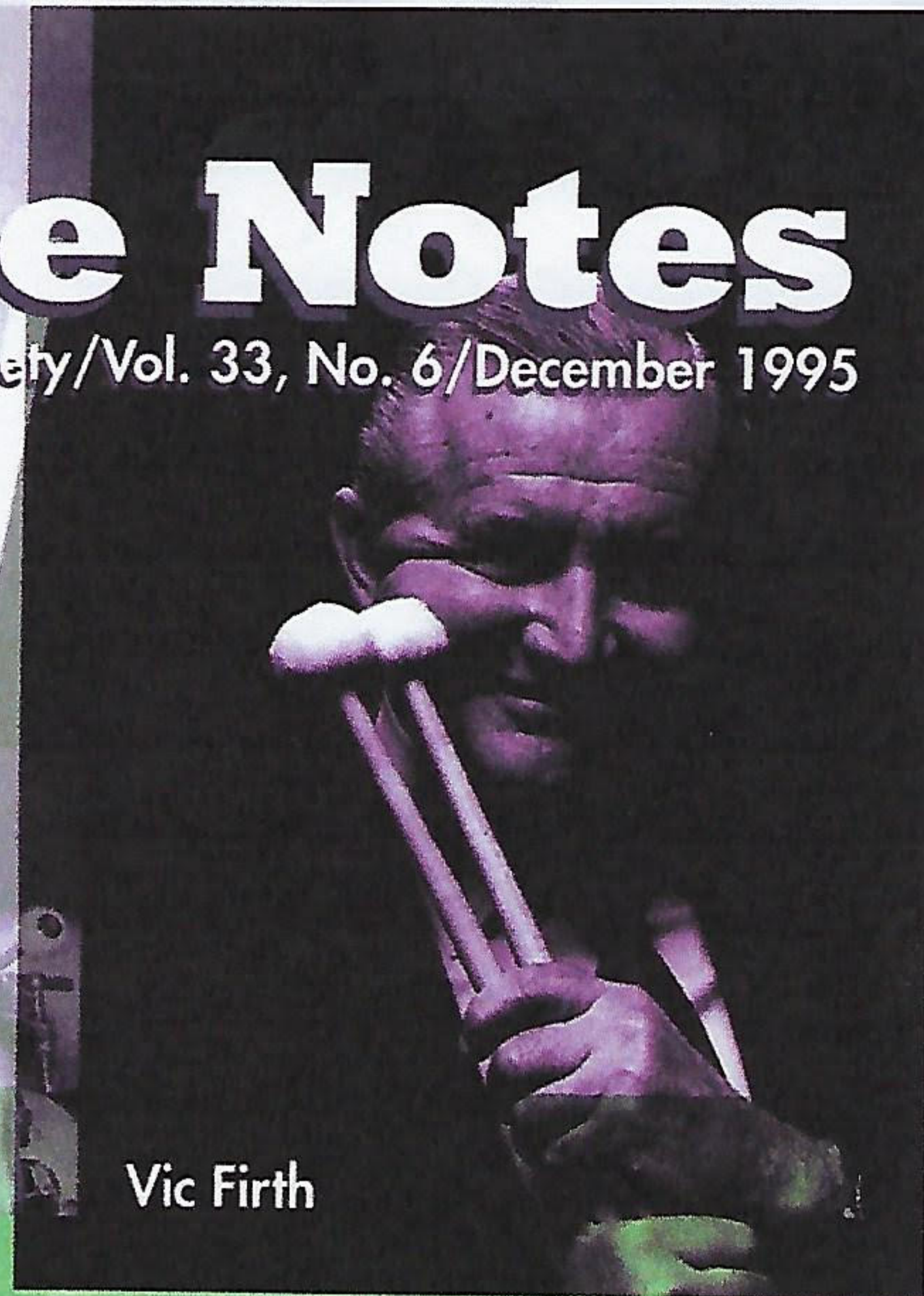
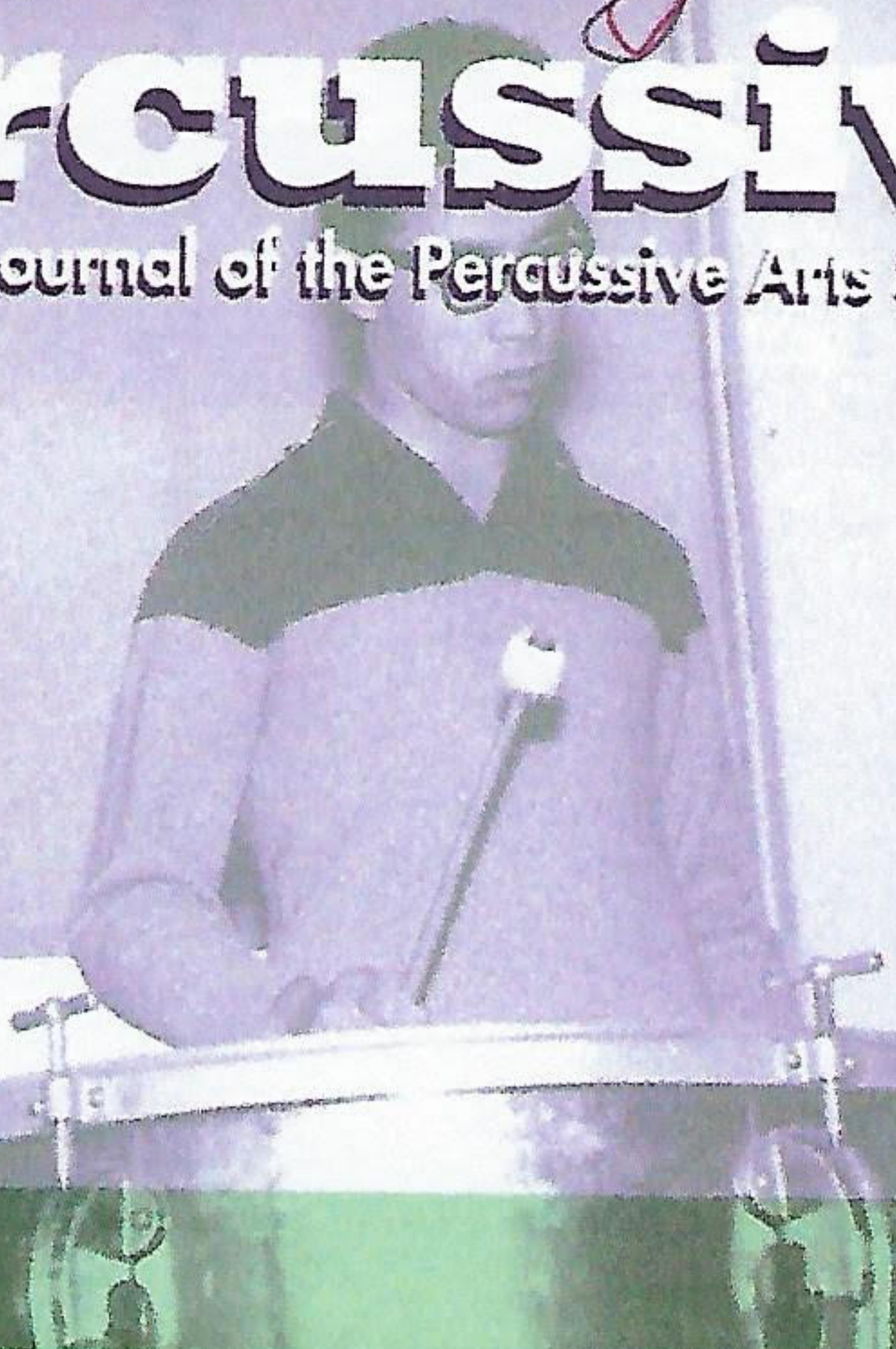


Eric Perrilloux Article #26

Percussive Notes

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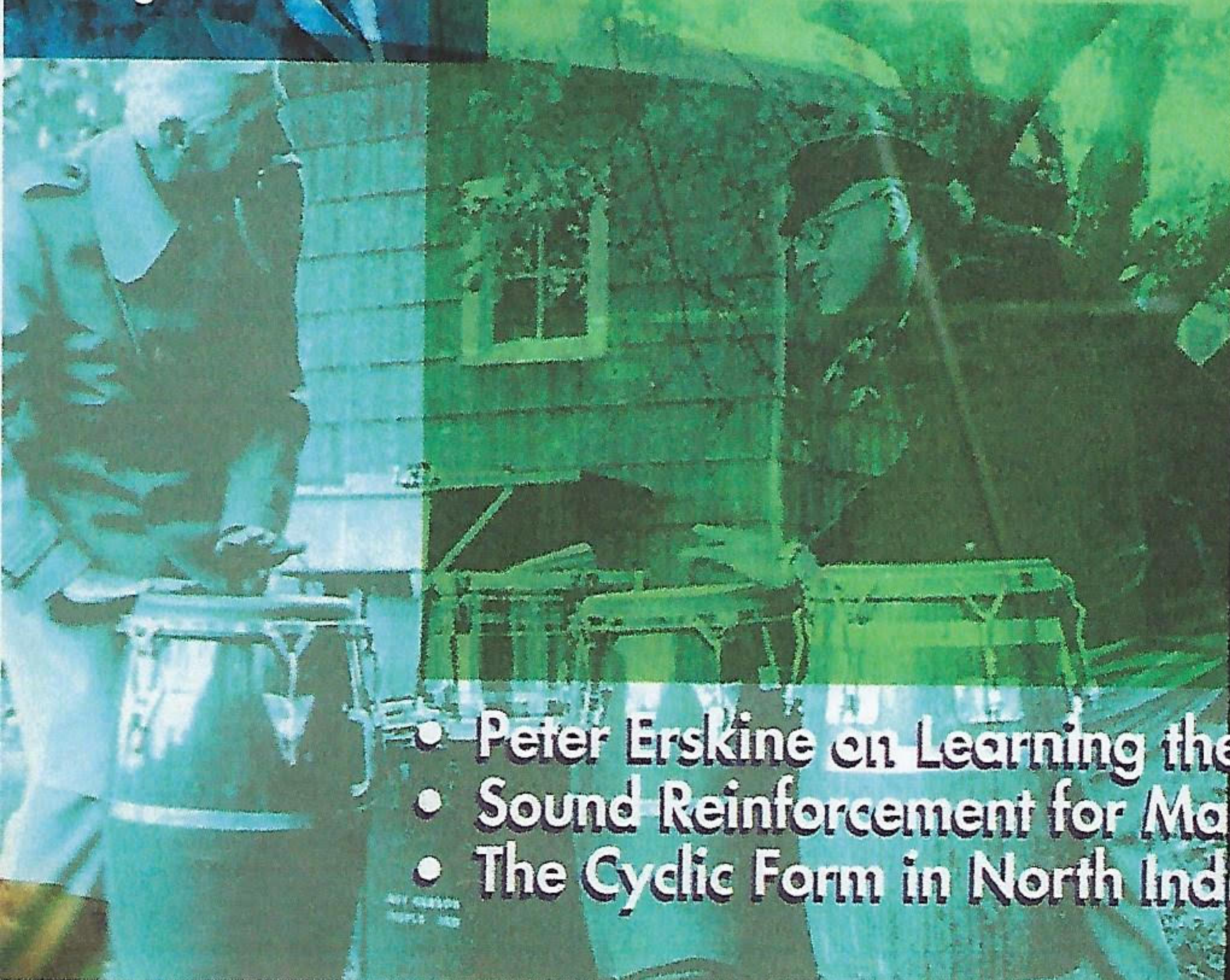


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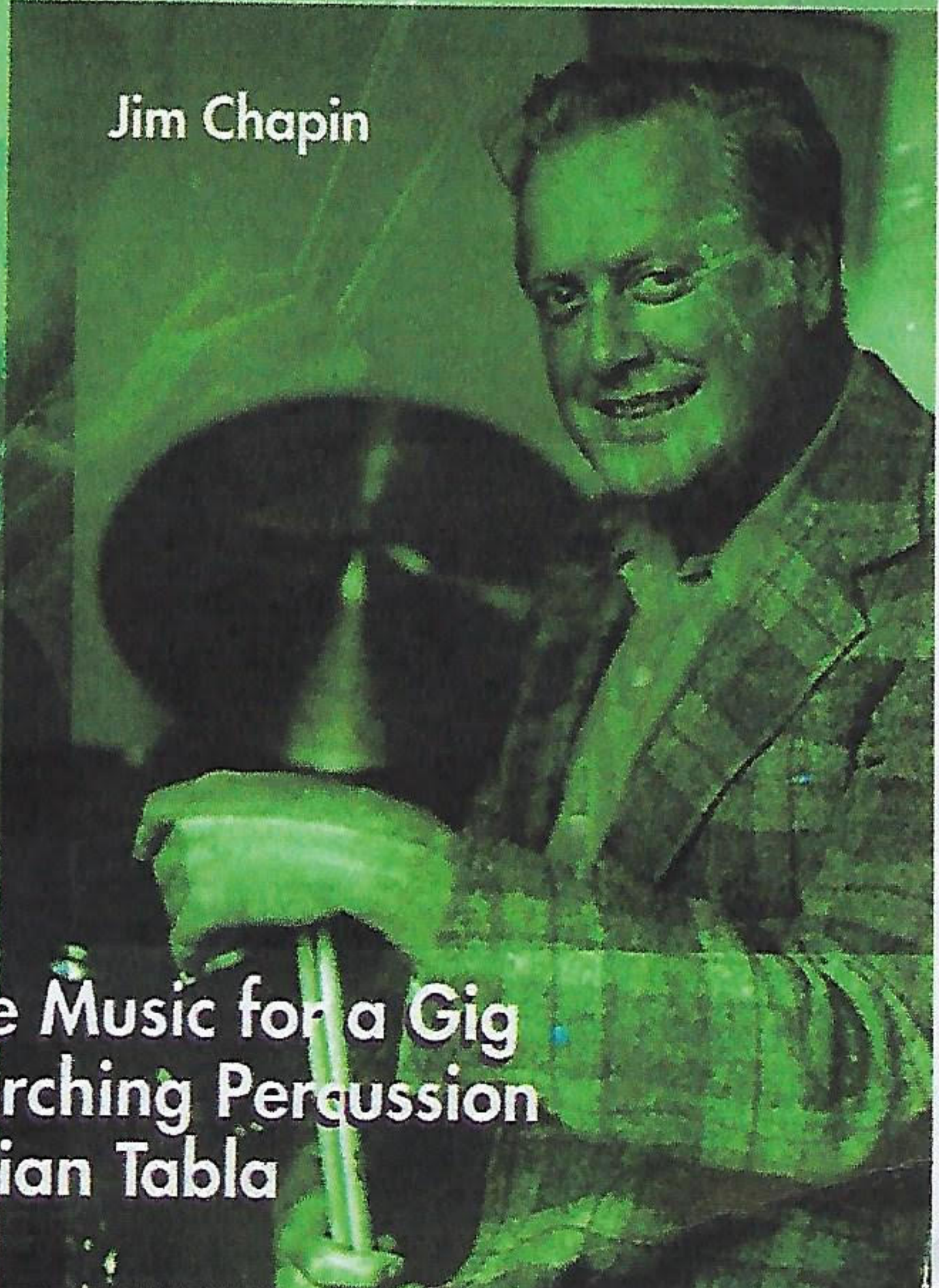


George Gaber

HALL OF FAME



Jim Chapin



- Peter Erskine on Learning the Music for a Gig
- Sound Reinforcement for Marching Percussion
- The Cyclic Form in North Indian Tabla

Eric Perrilloux Memoirs

Edited by Jeff Hartsough and Derrick Logozzo

One of rudimental drumming's most inspirational and influential figures is Eric Perrilloux, who was active as a teacher and player in both ancient and modern drum corps from 1935 to about 1980. During this period, drum corps evolved technically, musically and artistically. Perrilloux is one of the few firsthand witnesses to these transitions. In excerpts from his letter of October 4, 1993, he recalls the contests, equipment and playing styles used in drum corps through the years, as well as trends in the drumming itself.

Dear Derrick and Jeff,

After speaking to you on the telephone a few weeks ago, you seemed quite interested in the early days of rudimental drumming, so I thought you might like to hear of my experiences growing up in drum corps back then. Of course, rudimental drumming goes way back to the early 1800s Ashworth tactics, but for me, it was about 1935 that I first discovered such a thing as rudimental drumming. My eyes and ears popped open in amazement.

Up to that time, I was an ignorant drummer in a neighborhood Junior VFW Fife, Drum and Bugle Corps, the John Vincent Daniels VFW Post of Woodside, Long Island, New York. I started at age 12. We had no instructor except a dance band drummer who knew nothing of rudiments. All we did was parade to earn money for uniforms and we played simple tunes like "Anchors Away," "Halls of Montezuma" and "Yankee Doodle." We never saw a drum corps competition. We were pitifully bad but never knew any better.

In time our little corps started to go to some small competitions (only standstill—never knew anything about marching and maneuvering corps at that time). At one particular contest, which took place in the afternoon for a few Juniors, we went back at night to watch the Seniors play. It was there for the first time that I heard rudimental drumming. Outside the contest hall, which was a beer tavern in Maspeth, Long Island, there were some drummers playing. These drummers were practicing individually, doing things that I never heard before. They would start very slowly playing something (some sort of pattern of strokes) and increase the speed till it was very fast, and return slowly back to where they started. I found out that they were running down rudiments. I'd never heard of this, but these drummers were very good at it and had a sound that I never heard before. The sticks flew high in

the air and landed powerfully on the drum head. I watched all this spellbound. And they would play all kinds of different rudiments. I found out that these rudiments had names, all different.

I waited inside for this corps to compete and when they did, it sounded like thunder. I learned they were playing "The Downfall of Paris" with the fifes, which you couldn't hear because of the loud drumming echo inside the hall. And when the fifes finished, the bugles played their piece. I didn't know it at the time, but I was watching the Charles T. Kirk FD&B Corps, the best rudimental drum line in N.Y. State. This was a senior corps with all men, and big, 6-foot tall, rudimental bass drummers. This was in 1935.

Within days, I was in all the music stores in New York City looking for books on rudiments. Now that I heard really good drumming, you couldn't hold me back. I started to teach myself from these books, the most prevalent being the Bruce and Emmett Drum book. In time I could play some rudiments and drum beats in the book. I had trouble with the drum music, so I taught myself the fife in order to figure out the drum music. I left the junior corps and joined a senior FD & B corps also in the neighborhood, the Blissville American Legion drum corps. They had just gotten two older regimental drummers who played rudiments but played close to the drum head, not like the "Kirks" full arm motion—the sound just wasn't the same.

After a while I joined a small junior drum and bugle corps, the B.J. Coleman Post. They had a couple of rudimental drummers there who weren't bad and went to bigger contests and got to see more corps. I saw corps that I never saw before as well as the Charles T. Kirks, and no doubt about it—the Kirks were the best. Our little Bugle and Drum Corps went to the New York State Field Day Championships held in Mt. Vernon, N.Y. that year, 1937. I had never been to a Field Day. For the first time, I saw ancient corps from Connecticut play. It was something completely new for me to see, the fife and drum corps in their Colonial uniforms with three-cornered hats, and those long, long rope drums parading into the contest grounds. All Field Days were preceded by a parade of all the contestants.

The ancient corps had a sound and sway all their own. The typical deep drum sound with their heavy booming rudimental bass was always identified with the ancient corps. There was a junior ancient corps at the con-

test, the State Champions from Endicott-Johnson, New York. They wore bright orange and black Colonial uniforms—a large corps for standstills: 8 snares and 4 basses. They sounded like a freight train coming down the street.

The Field Days were great days for drum corps. Lots of camaraderie. In the years that I knew, 1937-1942, there would be at least 50 drum corps or more of different categories—modern Fife and Drum; Ancient Fife and Drum; modern Fife, Drum and Bugle; combination Fife, Drum and Bugle (bells, some trumpets); Juniors and Senior classes [all divisions]; plus all the individual events—snare drum, rudimental bass drumming, fife, bugling, baton twirling, also in senior and junior classes. They all competed for the title that would come only once a year—New York State or Connecticut State Champions and a few other outside regional Field Days.

The contest would take place all day long, generally in an open athletic field where the corps would play on the "Main Stand," while on the extreme outskirts of the field, the Individual Contests would take place. There were so many contestants that it would carry on into the night moving to a nearby hall in town. Any incomplete individual contests would also carry on to completion. Outside in the streets, ragamuffin corps would form on the spot by anyone who felt like playing and marching around. Drummers and fifers from all different corps would be playing together parading in and out of taverns or just standing together playing standard drumbeats and fife tunes that everyone knew, like "The Downfall of Paris," "Old Dan



Eric Perrilloux

Tucker," "Grandfather Clock," "Connecticut Half-Time: parts 1-5," "Burns Moore 6/8," "Caledonia," etc. It didn't matter if you knew the parts or not, just follow along. It was just a wonderful time to be young and beating a drum or playing a fife! Those were the best drum corps days of my *life*. There was nothing like a drum corps Field Day—they were *glorious*!

When it was finally over and the scores were tabulated late at night, the prizes were awarded in the competition hall. This event would involve a large crowd waiting for the results. When the winners were announced, loud cheers filled the room. Then they would go outside in the streets and play and parade some more till early hours in the morning. It was more like a festival. It was a great time for drum corps—then the war came.

I remember Dec. 7, 1941 quite well, for the New York State Fife and Drum Corps Association was holding its regular meeting of corps representatives. I was there. It was held at the Elmhurst FD&B Corps American Legion Hall in Elmhurst, Long Island, New York—a very large place that was filled to capacity with drum corps people. The meeting was almost over when it was announced that Pearl Harbor had been bombed!

After the war, drum corps activity resumed, but somehow, it wasn't quite the same. There didn't seem to be as many drum corps as there were before the war. Contests were less often and smaller. The atmosphere wasn't the same. It was as if an era was slowly passing by. Marching and Maneuvering Drum and Bugle Corps were getting popular.

The Charles T. Kirks was a modern drum corps that played strictly rudimental drumming at 120 beats per minute—*no cymbals*. Cymbals were frowned on in rudimental drum lines. "Pop" Ripperger, the senior citizen of the fife line, used to say, "This isn't one of those *ching to ching* corps."

The Kirks also played a great deal of Ancient music at 110 beats per minute. A typical Kirk rehearsal would start on Thursday night at 8 P.M. with eight to nine section practices, all occurring separately. At 9 P.M., the fifes and drums would play together till 9:30 P.M. playing quicksteps, jigs, reels and ancient numbers. At 9:30 P.M., the bugles would come in and all three sections would play (not at one time) at only 120 beats per minute. Much of the music was arranged by "Pop Ripp." They had a classic old antique trunk that held all the fife and bugle music

meticulously written out on 16" x 20" placards. Pop Ripp would pull out a set of music for the night, and it was set up, I believe, on a folding chair on top of the trunk for the fifers to play. Drum parts were not written out; everything was memorized. It would take about four rehearsals, even more, to play through all the music. They had an exceptionally large repertoire and each year more music was continually added.

In all, I spent 15 years in the Kirks before I went in M&M corps in 1953. That famous trunk with its music now resides at the Company of Fifers and Drummers Headquarters Museum in Ivoryton, Connecticut. The Kirk uniform was like the U.S. Marine dress uniform of the time: dark navy-blue jacket, high collar, dark blue peak cap, light blue pants with a red stripe, red braids across the chest, a black leather belt, and drum sling.

When speaking to you on the phone, you mentioned Sanford A. Moeller. He was called Gus Moeller by his friends. I met him through the Kirks. When I was 16 he must have been in his late 50s. He lived in Sunnyside, Long

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Island, New York. Although a drum teacher, he was probably more famous for his Grand Republic Rope Drums. They were most likely the best rope drums you could buy. They were beautifully handcrafted with the American Eagle Emblem of the United States hand painted on the shells with Gold Leaf Trim. He was very proud of his drums.

In 1938, the Kirks ordered a complete set of Moeller Drums: 17" x 17" snare drums, one 17" x 18" snare drum, and a full set of bass drums. On the shell of each drum along with the Eagle Emblem was the "Charles T. Kirk scroll." They were beautiful drums. The artwork was magnificent. In his later years, he sold all his drum-making machinery and designs. I believe it is in the hands of Bill Reamer of Philadelphia, PA, who now makes the drums exactly the way Gus Moeller made them. They still are fine, fine drums.

I got to know Gus Moeller when I would bring down the Kirk Moeller drums for periodic conditioning. Incidentally, when the Kirks disbanded sometime in the mid 1960s, the Ancient Mariners from Connecticut bought them. They still have them. Number 6 was my drum. Moeller's drum workshop was in his basement. When you went down, you would always see shells, drum rims and parts hanging from the ceiling, and of course, his special machinery for bending the shells into shape. He was a very methodical man, robust, quiet, bald, and always had a twinkle in his eye, carrying a firm portly mid-section.

He gave his drum lessons in the basement. He, at one time, taught Gene Krupa of the Benny Goodman Orchestra, and showed me where he would take Krupa out in his backyard and make him do calisthenics to loosen up his arms. Krupa, of course, could play rudiments and was largely responsible

for making the drum a solo instrument in the swing band era. Every time that I hear the Benny Goodman classic "Sing, Sing, Sing," with Krupa beating out the toms solo and the fast singles at the end, I can't help but think that Gus Moeller's rudimental impact in his lessons was influential in Krupa's success.

Incidentally, a little side story. In 1939, Gene Krupa formed his own band and was making an appearance at the "Dancing Campus," an attraction at the World's Fair in Flushing, New York. He ran a drumming contest on one Saturday and I entered. I competed against some 40 swing drummers who played on full dance band drum sets to some music accompaniment (Krupa's band musicians). A winner was chosen from every six or so drummers to play later in the finals. I appeared in my uniform and rope drum and Krupa himself seemed puzzled at what I should do. He asked me to run down the Long Roll and the Flamacue, and then asked me to run down the Flamacue again—this time alternating it, something I had never done before. I started out okay, but after a while, I stumbled on it. (In the Strube drum book, you do not alternate the Flamacue.) Krupa said, "That's all right. It's tricky if you never did it before." Nevertheless, I qualified for the finals. In the finals, all the swing drummers, individually, played on the drum sets for about three to four minutes. I played "The Downfall of Paris," single and double, and the audience, being all young swing band people, loved it. The winner was chosen by the audience, and I won by acclamation! First prize was a shiny pearl Slingerland dance band drum.

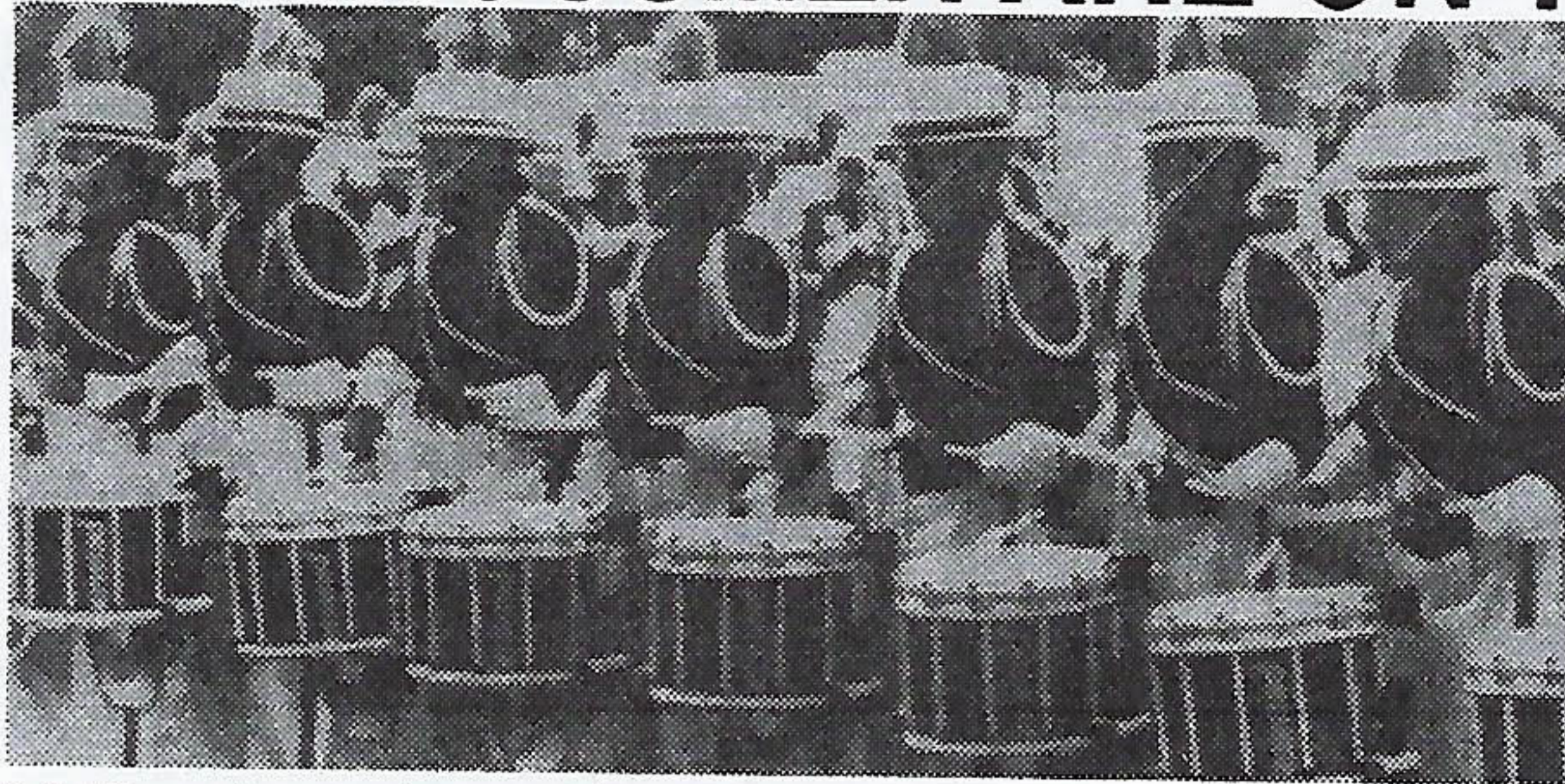
Gus Moeller was usually the timing judge at competitions, where he used a special mechanical counter that he devised. He would

operate the clock in time with the tempo at which the competing corps was playing and determine with a stop watch if they played 110 beats per minute, 120 or 128, and how much they were off in tempo. He would then compute a score based on 100% for perfect time. He certainly was a colorful man. I understand that he once marched all alone from New York to Boston playing on his rope drum. I believe there are news photos of this feat somewhere.

One thing I found quite different when I started to go back to watch Ancient Musters and Jaybird Days around 1980—the quality of the drumming was not nearly as good as it was in the years 1937-42, and 1946-52, when I left. None of the new drummers had that "quality-calibre sound," a term I invented to describe the ultimate in drum sound. Briefly, quality is the degree in excellence in rolls and rudiments, especially rolls, while calibre is the ability to maintain that excellence through all ranges of expression, especially the top fortes and double fortes. The better clean drummers played rather low, about 6-8". Many young drummers really looked and sounded like unschooled beginners. Where were the new Quigleys, Redicans and Arsenaults? There were none! No one attacked the 7-stroke and 15-stroke rolls from eye level in a full arm motion (tips of sticks that is) as did all the strong drummers of the 1937-42 era. The full-bodied sound wasn't there.

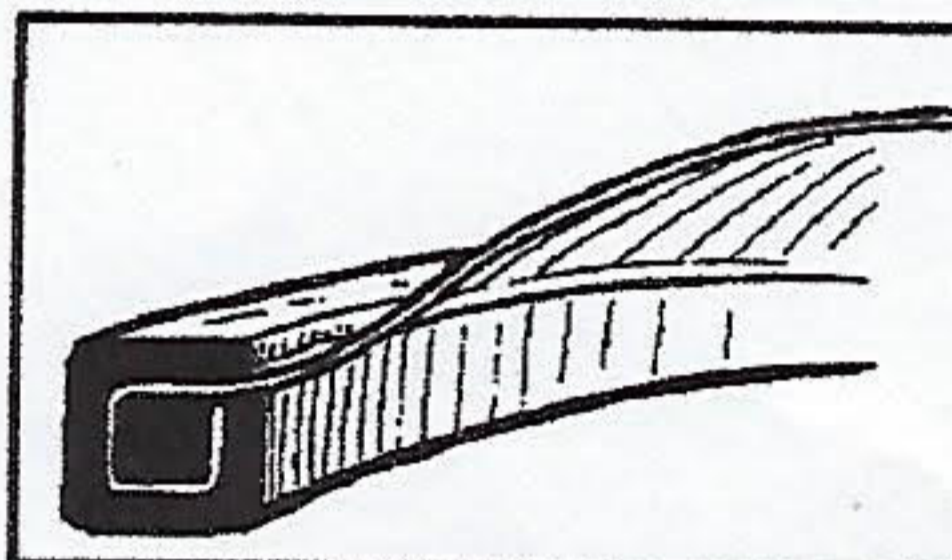
I have a rare vintage recording of the Charles T. Kirk FD&B corps competing at the Connecticut State Field Day at Bowen Field, New Haven, Conn. Aug. 4, 1951. I remember that we played a little fast that day. The Kirks were a modern Rudimental corps that played at 120 beats per minute, which took some pretty good drummers to

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From the day that I went into M&M, I played and taught only one way—the use of full arm and wrist motion to produce the total sound range. I had heard and seen the great drummers from my standstill days and that was my standard in teaching. My drum lines rarely got credit for this on score sheets, which for many, many years, were based on negative tick markings—a ridiculous concept. I could write a book on the shortcomings of judging, DCI drumming, its influences over the years, and how it has led to the sorry state of drumming in M&M across the country.

The St. Rita Brassmen drum line was an exceptionally fine drum line, and in my opinion, was as close to the Redican, Quigly sound that you could get, which, I repeat, was my standard in teaching. I was probably the only one who taught this in M&M back in 1955, except for Frank Arsenault and Earl Sturtze, and I refused to change. In 1972, drum lines were still mostly small in size. The "Brassmen" had 3-4 snares, 3-4 double toms, 2 larger timp-toms, 4 marching hand-cranked timpani, 2 basses and 2 cymbals. The timp section was extraordinary. I had my own concept on what toms should do and their scoring was most involved and co-

ordinated to follow all the constant chord changes in the music played. They were always in perfect tune, even on the march. No sideline "pit" existed in those years. No one could come close to them [the Brassmen] in quality-calibre drumming, but it was rarely judged—just count ticks. Ignorance is bliss.

I have a copy of the Spring, 1980 *Percussionist* of the Percussive Arts Society, which I believe Dan Spalding sent to me. Dan Spalding is a fine quality rudimental drummer and teacher who believes as I do in total sound range with rolls, rudiments, etc. He had a very promising drum line in 1976, the Chicago Cavaliers, that he taught along with Jim Roussel. In this *Percussionist* issue, he has a very excellent article on the history of rudimental drumming, which I'm sure you have read. In preparing this article, he had contacted me and we talked quite a bit. He tried to continue to teach quality-calibre drumming to the Spirit of Atlanta when they were first founded, and he was doing a good job for a new drum line. I think it's important that young people today and in the future should be able to learn of what went on in the earlier years of drumming.

Glad to be of help.

Yours in true drum corps spirit,

Eric Perrilloux

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