

LAKE SIDE

Percussion Studio

Concepts and Techniques

Toxic Technique

Are the snare drum techniques used by today's competitive drumlines harmful from a musical perspective?

I recently spent some time discussing drum corps snare drum technique with my friend and teacher Jerry Garcia. No, he's not a ghost from the Grateful Dead! Jerry is a world-class rudimental drummer, who's spent his life watching, and sometimes causing, the evolution of modern drumlines. And what he had to say scared me.

The thing is, modern drumlines are competitive. Very, *very* competitive. Everything they do comes from that perspective; it's all about uniformity, elimination of error, and putting on an exciting visual show. Champions do what it takes to win, and then everyone copies them. It makes perfect logical sense. But does it make musical sense? Sometimes the answer is no.

Altering one's musical technique to achieve robotic precision while eliminating individual expression is a huge price to pay, not something to be done lightly or unnecessarily. So I had to ask myself whether it was right for me to go down that path, either in my own playing, or in what I teach. The answer was no. Outside of competition, contemporary drum corps snare drum technique is simply not a good way to play drums.

So what *is* a good way to play drums?

1. Does no harm musically. Proper technique should enable you to authentically and expressively perform many styles of music. As a drumset player your primary job is to lay down a groove, and good technique should make your groove deeper and more natural sounding.
2. Is natural, relaxed, efficient, and safe.
3. Promotes both uniformity and individuality.
4. Applies to many styles of music.