

Traditional grip: why it should never be used

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Back in the 1700's, life was a lot different. There were no cars, no electricity, and women couldn't vote. So much progress has gone on since then.

Similarly, marching bands didn't have the fancy harnesses for their snare drum players that we have today. Instead of using a harness, the snare drum players would use a device that would allow them to march with the snare drum, but it would force them to play with their left hand upside down and with the stick weaved under the index and middle fingers and over the thumb, ring finger, and pinky. While this left hand was forced to play this strange way, their right hand played completely normally.

If someone is trying to get their hands to be as unbalanced as possible, that is a great way to do it. This only positive to this method of playing was that it allowed them to account for the slope that the snare drum was on. However, since the invention of the harness, the purpose of traditional grip has been completely defeated. Yet, contrary to the progressions such as the ones mentioned earlier, today's marching bands still use the grip because that was what the first marching bands used. While marching bands use traditional grip, all other types of ensembles such as concert bands and jazz bands use normal grip.

If marching band directors today want their snare players to be as good as possible, they must make them use normal grip during marching band. All snare players in a marching band are also percussionists in a concert band. Because of this, they all have to know how to play normal grip. Playing the traditional way only hurts percussionists' snare technique. As strange as it sounds, it takes lots of practice for any percussionist to make their normal

grip technique good. There are quite a few things that snare players need to consider when they play.

For example, if a player is right-handed, then his right hand will tend to play louder than his left hand. It will take lots of practice to just even out their hands. Also, when someone is playing complex rhythms, their grip tends to loosen up. These are only a couple of difficulties of playing normally. When traditional grip is introduced, so is a whole new batch of technical things that the player must worry about. Even with normal grip, it takes time and effort to even out the volume of the two hands.

Imagine how hard that is when one of the player's hands is upside down. When playing traditionally, the player must now try even harder to even out his hands. Naturally, his left hand would now be much softer than his right hand. Furthermore, he must now try really hard to play loudly with his left hand. At the same time, his left hand for normal grip doesn't have to try as hard to be as loud as the right. But, because of the fact that this snare marcher has played traditionally, he is now in the habit of needing to slam his left hand hard in order to make it as loud as the right.

Now, when he plays normal grip, his left hand might be even louder than his right. This is only one of the problems he will run into when he plays normal grip again. He will also make other technical mistakes because he hasn't practiced them. Snare players in marching bands must use normal grip or their technique will suffer. A second problem with traditional grip is that it causes marching band auditions to be very inaccurate. A very large part of

marching band auditions is based on how well the players can play repeated eighth notes.

With traditional grip, it is necessary that players must play this simple rhythm just to see whose technique is best. But, the issue with this is that during an actual marching band show, snare players must know how to play much more complicated rhythms than eighth notes. Also, learning traditional grip doesn't take nearly as long as improving a player's ability to read music. Therefore, even if a good player's traditional grip technique isn't good at first, he can easily improve it throughout the season. But, if there is a player without musical ability but good technique, it may take him longer than the season's length to learn how to play the tricky rhythms. In addition, when such a large part of the audition consists of eighth notes, a bad musician could get a snare spot over a much better musician because everyone knows how to play such a simple rhythm.

Having a bad musician will be very bad for the snare line, and will even affect the whole marching band. During rehearsal, it is very important for the other instruments to listen to the drum line. If even one of the snare players is struggling with their music, it can easily throw off the rest of the band. If normal grip was used, the auditions wouldn't have to focus as much on technique, and they could be designed to determine who the best musicians actually are. When the best musicians are taken, the band is much less likely to be disrupted by sloppy playing.

If band directors want their marching bands to improve, they must make their snare players use normal grip. Another major problem with traditional

grip is that it fails to teach the players about an important life lesson. This lesson is that progress constantly goes on in the world, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. One of school's main purposes is to educate their kids about what goes on in the world. As for traditional grip, schools decide to keep using it despite the many strong reasons not to use it. And they do this solely because that was what the first marching bands did.

By doing this, they are basically telling their snare players that progress doesn't have to happen if they don't want it to. In the real world, progress happens every day. Sometimes, you just have to move on. There is no doubt at all that this is the time to move on past the days of traditional grip. Snare players in marching bands today must stop using traditional grip. The many problems that it brings outweigh its one positive by a ton.

We have cars, we have electricity, and women can vote. The 1700's are over, and I am ready to move on. Apparently, however, today's marching bands aren't.