

Percussive Notes

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2010 Hall of Fame

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Stanley Leonard

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Stanley Leonard is best known as the principal timpanist with the Pittsburgh Symphony, a position he held for almost four decades. But he is also a prolific composer and a dedicated educator. From over 50 PSO recordings to compositions such as “Circus,” Leonard has left an indelible musical footprint for musicians, especially percussionists.



MUSICAL INHERITANCE

Stan Leonard was born on September 26, 1931 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His mother was a pianist and his father a singer, so there was always music in the Leonard house.

The family moved from Pennsylvania to Independence, Missouri—a suburb of Kansas City—where Stan started taking snare drum lessons from a tuba player who owned the local music store. “But he did show me how to hold the sticks,” Leonard says. “And since I had been playing piano from the age of six, I could read music.”

His junior high school band director, a violinist in the Kansas City Philharmonic, suggested that Stan study with the principal percussionist of the orchestra, Vera McNary (now Vera Daehlin). For the next six years, he studied with Vera and would eventually join her in the KCP percussion section.

“I played percussion in the band at William Chrisman High School,” Leonard recalls. “And there was an orchestra in Independence called the Little Symphony. My parents were friendly with the conductor, so I auditioned for him.” Following a short performance on the snare drum, the conductor took Stan downstairs to a rehearsal hall to see a primitive set of hand-tuned timpani that had come from Belgium at the turn of the previous century.

“Even though we didn’t have any timpani at the high school, I knew what they were,” Leonard says. “The conductor showed me that if you tighten the head, it makes the note go up, and if you loosen the head, the pitch goes down. He gave me a pair of sticks and told me to come to the next rehearsal.

“I vividly remember it. We played Schubert’s ‘Unfinished Symphony.’ I had to ask one of the horn players to play a B-natural for me because I didn’t yet own a pitchpipe! Eventually our high school bought a set of Leedy pedal timpani and I was in heaven. It was 1947 and I bought a copy of *The Ludwig Timpani Instructor* book that had been published in 1930. I still have that book. There was a section in there by Joseph Zettleman, who was the timpanist in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the early 20th century. He had written exercises for pedal timpani and I practiced all of them.”

For links to videos featuring Stanley Leonard as well as a list of Leonard’s compositions, visit

www.pas.org/publications/November2010webextras.aspx

Web Extra

By the time Stan was in 10th grade, McNary suggested that he take lessons from the orchestra’s timpanist, Ben Udell. “He was a former student of Saul Goodman,” explains Leonard. “He and Goodman were my idols and I tried to imitate the way they played, so I didn’t sit down; I stood up and danced around and tried to be Saul Goodman!

“I would go to the library in downtown Kansas City to research all the scores that had big percussion parts in them. I would write the parts down by hand—I still have the notebook—and that’s one of the ways I learned repertoire. I also used to listen to the New York Philharmonic on the radio Sunday afternoons. I would put two pillows on the dresser in my bedroom and play along with Saul Goodman.”

NORTHWESTERN, GRACELAND, AND EASTMAN

Leonard started playing percussion with the Kansas City Philharmonic during his senior year in high school. “I played with them for two years, earning enough money to help pay for school,” he recalls. Following a semester at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois—where he studied with Edward Metzinger, timpanist with the Chicago

Symphony—Leonard moved to Lamoni, Iowa to be near his childhood sweetheart, Peggy, to whom he has been married 58 years. While there, he attended Graceland College (now Graceland University) for a semester.

“One of the faculty members at Graceland had his doctorate from Eastman and suggested I go there,” Leonard explains. “I was accepted as a sophomore and was at Eastman for three years.” While in Rochester, Leonard studied under the legendary William Street. Among his classmates were two other future PAS Hall of Fame members: John Beck and Gordon Peters.

Leonard was a charter member of the first Eastman Wind Ensemble as well as a member of the famous Marimba Masters percussion ensemble. “There were only six percussion majors in the whole school, and there were three orchestras, a wind ensemble, plus two bands,” he remembers. “We were just playing like crazy, which is what I wanted.”

Leonard graduated from Eastman in 1954 with a Bachelor of Music degree and a Performer’s Certificate in Percussion. Following a 21-month stint in the 19th Army Band at Fort Dix, New Jersey, where he served as timpanist,



Percussionists in the Eastman Wind Ensemble (1954)

L–R: James Dotson (deceased), John Beck, Mitch Peters, Stan Leonard (on timpani), and Gordon Peters.

assistant conductor, and chief clerk, he auditioned for the Pittsburgh Symphony and won the job as principal timpanist in 1956.

PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY (1956–1994)

Leonard's audition differed from contemporary ones. "There were three of us," he recalls, "and we played in front of each other on the stage. There were three people on the committee: the conductor [William Steinberg], the assistant conductor, and the personnel manager. They must have listened to me play for two or three hours." And that was the beginning of his 38-year career in the Steel City.

During his long tenure, Leonard played under the batons of PSO music directors Steinberg (1956–76), Andre Previn (1976–84), and Lorin Maazel (1985–96), as well as Sir Thomas Beecham, Edo DeWart, Charles Dutoit, Christoph Eschenbach, Erich Leinsdorf, James Levine, Pierre Monteaux, Charles Munch, Seiji Ozawa, Leonard Slatkin, George Solti, Leopold Stokowski, and Michael Tilson Thomas, among others.

"One of my favorites was Eugene Ormandy," Leonard says. "In the early 1960s, he told me that the Pittsburgh Symphony was the only orchestra his manager would allow him to guest conduct! I enjoyed his conducting and the way he shaped the orchestra's sound."

He also played under the baton of several composer/conductors, including Leonard Bernstein, Pierre Boulez, Carlos Chavez, Aaron Copland, Mar-

vin Hamlisch, Paul Hindemith, Witold Lutoslawski, Henry Mancini, Kristof Penderecki, and John Williams. With thousands of concerts under his belt, does Leonard have any favorite composers? "I always loved Beethoven and Brahms symphonies," he says. "Steinberg was a master at that. I didn't know much about Bruckner and Mahler before I took the job, but Mahler One and Five are now two of my favorites."

While he was timpanist, the Pittsburgh Symphony played concerts all over the world, including a two-and-a-half month State Department tour of Europe and the Middle East in 1964. Leonard also made five solo appearances with the symphony, including two American premieres and two pieces commissioned for him. In 1958, he played Darius Milhaud's "Concerto for Percussion and Small Orchestra," and in 1964 he gave the American premiere of Werner Tharichen's "Concerto for Timpani and Orchestra."

"In 1973," Leonard recalls, "a friend of mine in the orchestra, Byron McCulloh, wrote a four-movement piece for me called 'Symphony Concertante for Timpanist and Orchestra.' The instrumentation was for eight tom-toms in one movement and five timpani plus four Roto-toms in another. The introduction to the last movement included a prerecorded timpani recitative that I played with, so I was playing this duet with myself. It was unique."

Leonard also gave the American premiere of "Concertino for Timpani, Percussion, and Strings" by Andrzej Panufnik in 1981, followed three years

later by the world premiere of Raymond Premru's "Celebration Overture for Solo Timpani and Orchestra."

After almost forty seasons in Pittsburgh, Leonard retired in 1994, and subsequently moved to Naples, Florida. "I felt that I was at the top of my game," he says. "I took a three-month sabbatical while Peggy

and I traveled all over the country looking for places to retire. And I didn't miss playing at all. It had been a little test. I'm not like some of my colleagues who can't stand not to play. I love playing—and I still play a little bit—but the playing job that I had been doing for 38 years left me fulfilled."

CARNEGIE MELLON AND DUQUESNE

As most symphony players do, Leonard decided to share his musical knowledge through teaching. He began his career in education in 1958 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and stayed there for 20 years. Afterwards, he taught privately in his home studio. In 1988, he decided to go back to the collegiate world, this time at Duquesne University, where he stayed for more than a decade.

Over the years, his students have performed with orchestras, taught at all levels, and been involved in the music industry. One of his former students at Carnegie Mellon, Michael Kumer, became the Dean of the School of Music at Duquesne. Tony Ames joined the National Symphony in 1968 and is the principal percussionist. Tom Wetzel serves as principal percussionist with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. Brian Del Signore is principal percussionist of the Houston Symphony. And Ed Stephan, principal timpanist of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra for the past nine years, became the principal timpanist with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra this season.

Another former student is Ruth Cahn, former percussionist with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and now Jack Frank Instructor of Percussion in the Eastman Community Music School and Summer Session Director of the Eastman School of Music. She studied with Leonard when she was a high school student in Pittsburgh. "I well remember my Saturday lessons at their home," she says. "I am eternally grateful to Stan's career guidance that sent me to Eastman to study with his mentor, William Street. Stanley Leonard encouraged me to go further with percussion at a time when very few women were accepted in the percussion performance world."

Leonard has taught clinics and master classes at some of the finest



Stanley Leonard Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra 1959

schools across the country: Curtis Institute, Interlochen, Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory, University of North Texas, and his alma mater, Eastman, to name a few. And during some of the PSO's international tours, he taught at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Copenhagen, Denmark, and at the Komaki Academy of Music in Tokyo, Japan.

"I took my education job very seriously," he says. "In my early university days (late 1950s), the students were fairly talented but you were teaching them almost from scratch. Later on the students coming to college were so much better prepared. For example, I recently heard a senior in high school play both movements of my 'Canticle for Timpani,' which would never have happened back in the 1970s when I wrote it."

Leonard has also been a regular performer at PASIC since his retirement from the symphony. At PASIC '96 in Nashville he gave a clinic/performance with Tempus Fugit percussion ensemble; taught a timpani master class at PASIC '98 in Orlando; gave a clinic with Sal Rabbio at PASIC 2001 in Nashville; presented a Timpani FUNDamentals session with Ruth Cahn at PASIC 2002 in Columbus; and led a Symphonic Lab and judged the Mock Timpani Audition at PASIC 2004 in Nashville. He also played as part of the Symphonic Emeritus clinic/performances in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2007, and 2009.

COMPOSER

Starting in the late 1950s, Leonard began yet another aspect of his varied career: composing. "There



Stan Leonard recording timpani solos for *Canticle* CD



Recording *Collage* CD with Louisiana State University Percussion Group Hamirouge (Stan Leonard conducting)

wasn't a whole lot of music for percussion ensembles to play at that time," he says. "So I wrote pieces that fit my students' skills and interest. I also started writing timpani solos as well as gathering material for my book, *Pedal Technique for the Timpani*, which wasn't published until 1988." Over forty of his pieces for percussion and timpani are published by Bachovich Music, Boosey and Hawkes, C. Alan Publications, drop6 Media, Ludwig Masters Music (formerly Ludwig Music Publishing), Marimba Productions, PerMus Publications, and Row-Loff. Another four dozen pieces are listed in his own catalog.

One of his favorite and most popular compositions is one of the first he ever wrote: "Circus." His "Symphony for Percussion" is also very popular and was recently republished by drop6.

RECORDING ARTIST

During his tenure with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Leonard played on more than four dozen recordings, including all the symphonies by Beethoven and Brahms. He also has three "solo" CDs to his credit. *Canticle* (Ludwig Masters Music) was recorded in 1996 and features all his own music. "I wanted to be able to demonstrate for future

generations how I played my own compositions," he says.

Leonard's second CD, *Collage* (C. Alan Publications), was recorded in 2007 at Louisiana State University. He conducted several ensemble works, as did LSU Professor (and former student) Brett Dietz. This recording also features Leonard playing the solo "Collage" on his personal Hinger timpani.

His third CD, *Acclamation*, was released this fall. Recorded at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church in Naples, Florida, it features James Cochran on organ, Matt Sonneborn on trumpet, and Leonard on timpani. "It's a departure from my usual percussion music," he states. "It brings the organ and timpani together as musical companions."

THE FUTURE

What would Stan Leonard say to young percussionists in today's competitive environment? "There are so many fine players out there that they need to really hone their musical skills and their ability to interpret the music, as well as having excellent technique," he advises. "That's the thing that sets you apart—your 'musical personality,' as Steinberg used to call it. It's the most important thing—the way in which you are able to communicate the music.

"I am very thankful that percussion has gone from the times of Liszt—who was criticized because he used a triangle in one of his piano concertos—to our great world of percussion today. You know," he says with a smile, "they can't live without us anymore!" **PN**