



STANLEY LEONARD

The Contemporary Timpanist

By Lauren Vogel Weiss

“IN TODAY’S MUSICAL WORLD,” EXPLAINS Stanley Leonard, “a timpanist performs a greater variety of repertoire than ever before and must be prepared to interpret the musical expectations of composers, both classical and contemporary, with a new appreciation for the voice of the timpani.” Leonard, principal timpanist of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1956 through 1994 and currently Adjunct Professor of Percussion at Duquesne University, speaks from almost forty years of experience performing internationally with the symphony in concerts, recordings and television performances. As a soloist, Leonard has also premiered major new works for timpani and orchestra.

“The world of percussion has grown incredibly in the past twenty years: jazz percussion, world percussion, marching percussion and the marimba have gained new heights of musical achievement,” he says. “However, timpani are fundamental instruments that are too often treated as drums with no special voice. The contemporary timpanist must know and understand both the limits and the limitlessness of the timpani.

“The timpani are sensitive articulate instruments that can enhance or destroy a piece of music. They are musical devices with a powerful ability to influence the rhythmic flow and har-

monic character of an ensemble. They are also exciting solo instruments in their own right.”

During his PASIC '96 clinic, which will be more performance than clinic, Leonard will perform his own compositions *Canticle* (for unaccompanied solo timpani) and *Concertino for Solo Timpani and Keyboard Percussion Ensemble*. He will also give the world premiere of a new suite for solo timpani and piano, *Bits and Pieces* by Joseph Wilcox Jenkins.

“My goal is to demonstrate the musical dimensions of the timpani in solo and ensemble performance. The session will explore timpani performance techniques used in sound production, pedaling, tone production and sticking. I will point out certain technical details and then demonstrate the musical application of these techniques in orchestral, solo and ensemble repertoire.”

Leonard’s interpretation of sound production is based on his concepts of the sound of the timpani and the things he does to produce the most musical and most appropriate kind of sound. “In relationship to that,” he explains, “I will talk about sticks, too. Sound production includes both the stroke and the kind of timpani you’re playing on.” He will bring his own personal set of Hinger timpani to perform on in Nashville. “I really appreciate the dark sound of the Hinger drums,” he says.

He also serves as Percussion Editor for Ludwig Music Publishing Company and is the author of the instructional text *Pedal Technique for the Timpani*, plus numerous compositions for solo timpani, percussion, percussion ensemble and handbells. “I am developing a group of new pieces for timpani and piano, since there are not many pieces of any stature like that,” Leonard elaborates. “*Bits and Pieces* is one of the new works, along with *Motives* for timpani and piano by John Beck and *Hamac (The Hammock)* by Jean Batigne. One thing these pieces have in common is the melodic capabilities of the timpani.”

After nearly four decades with one of the premier orchestras in the world, Leonard recalls hundreds of memorable moments. “I especially remember my very last performance with the Pittsburgh Symphony. We were on tour in London with Maazel conducting and we played Beethoven’s *Eighth* and *Ninth Symphonies*—two of my favorite pieces. The people in the ‘arena’ area of Royal Albert Hall—the ones who would line up for hours ahead of time to buy inexpensive tickets—would talk to people in the orchestra. Someone had tipped them off about my retirement, and I received a message ‘From Arena to Stan.’ It said, ‘That’s a grand band you’re retiring from!’ and it certainly was. At the very end of the performance, after the Beethoven was completed and the conductor left the stage, I did a final flourish on the timpani, all by myself. That was memorable!”

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Stanley Leonard’s timpani clinic will be held at 11 A.M. on Thursday, November 21.