



My musical career started in the third grade with something called “Orff Class”. It was a music program designed by a German gentleman interested in developing a grade schooler’s musical talent.

By the fourth grade I was now old enough to participate in the school’s band program. I was certain I wanted to play the drums but a little touch of the flu prevented me from attending the after-school meeting where students along with their parents selected the instrument that they wanted to play in band. Mr. Bascom, the band director, suggested to my parents that since I had a little experience with an instrument called a Recorder that I might do well on the Clarinet. When my parents came home with the news that I would be starting in the woodwind section, I was a little disappointed but I was happy to be in the band nevertheless.

Starting out on Clarinet turned out to be a good decision for me. So often when kids first learn how to read music and count without a melodic basis it can be more confusing than it needs to be. Learning how to interpret a combination of two eighth notes and a quarter note is much easier when you can recognize it immediately as “Jingle Bells”. When you’re limited to a pair of sticks and a rubber pad, that same rhythm can be a bit harder to understand when there’s no discernible melody to relate it to.

I did well on Clarinet. I made All State Band in the seventh grade but I still wanted to play the drums. My parents allowed me to start taking drum lessons privately and I began what was a very involved schedule for a middle schooler. Every morning on Monday, Wednesday and Friday I played in Band 1 on Clarinet alternating between first and second chair. Tuesdays and Thursdays, I spent the mornings playing in Band 2 on the drums.

By my freshman year, I was forced into making a decision between Clarinet and drums. I didn’t need a whole lot of time to decide. By this time my private studies on the drums had led me to the Preparatory Department at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York where I studied with Ruth Cahn. I was also involved in the drumline in the High School marching band so dropping Clarinet in favor of focusing exclusively on the drums was fine with me.

Studying with Mrs. Cahn had opened up a whole new world. Rather than just practicing “beats” on the drumset, she had me take some piano lessons in order to better understand bass clef in preparation for instruction on Timpani. I also began learning how

to read on various mallet instruments. In addition, by my senior year in high school I knew the difference between an orchestral style of playing the snare drum as opposed to a rudimental style and I had also participated in several percussion ensembles. All of this would come in handy on the day that I auditioned for the Marine Corps Band program. I was accepted and ordered to report to the Armed Forces School of Music in Little Creek, Virginia after completing basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina.



The basic course at the School of Music was an incredibly rewarding time. Candidates for the Army, Navy and Marine Corps music program are given six months to complete a comprehensive course of study that includes theory, ear training as well as individual instruction on their instrument. My drum teacher was a Marine Corps Sergeant by the name of Mark Adams. He was an incredible musician and a great teacher. He would often counsel me on the importance of “groove”. Regardless of how technically outstanding a person’s playing might be, unless they are playing in a manner that inspires a positive emotional reaction from the listener and makes the musicians he is playing with feel comfortable, then he isn’t doing his job. In other words, don’t worry about being “impressive”; rather focus on being “musical”. I had an opportunity to apply his teachings in the various ensembles that were a part of the curriculum at the School of Music, but they would really come to bear at my first duty station; Fleet Marine Force Pacific Band - Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Being a military musician is far more than playing in a marching band. Especially as a Percussionist, you are expected to be able to play just as capably in a concert band setting as you are in a jazz combo or a stage band. You are trained to be able to cover a very broad spectrum of playing situations. Still, drumset was my forte and while I experienced a number of formative professional situations, one opportunity that was especially influential was playing with the choir at Trinity Missionary Baptist Church that was located just outside the gates of Pearl. This was no ordinary choir. These folks could sing and we had a great time every Sunday praising the Lord and grooving with a capital “G”. We actually made a record that was nominated for an award by the Hawaiian entertainment community. That was my first experience in the studio and would spark an ambition that would produce a collection of personal custom projects in the years to come.

I reported back to the School of Music in Virginia to attend the Intermediate Course; a very demanding course of instruction that covered traditional harmony, ear training, arranging up to a stage band level and conducting. Once again I was privileged to study under some wonderful teachers and upon graduation was actually invited to join their ranks and become a Drum Instructor. On January 5th, 1985 I reported back to the School of Music - this time I was coming on board as staff member and in so doing realized a dream come true.

Sergeant Adams had made a profound impression on me. The environment at the School of Music could best be described as a friendly competitiveness that was nothing short of

inspiring and that was due in part to Sergeant Adams. I remember my fellow students and I trying to out do one another in the amount of hours that we practiced. I remember also the conversations we would have about Sergeant Adams' playing and the assignments he would give us. By the time I graduated from the Basic Course, I had determined that to be a staff member at the School of Music would, in fact, be a dream come true. The thought of being in a position to positively influence a person professionally and musically the way Sergeant Adams had influenced me was a very motivating proposition. Now here I was a Sergeant myself, fresh from the Intermediate Course reporting back as an Instructor and I was both grateful to have been awarded this position and resolved to be to my students what Sergeant Adams had been to me.

Being an Instructor was an incredible experience. By the time I was discharged in October of 1990, I had helped to graduate over 150 candidates to the Army, Navy and Marine Corps Band programs. Being at the school also afforded me opportunities to complete my Bachelor's degree in Business Management. I also audited a couple of advanced courses in Counterpoint and Concert Band arranging by that time so by the time I was ready to leave the Corps I felt I had adequately prepared for whatever opportunities I would find in the civilian sector. On October 29th, 1990, I retired my uniform having been awarded the Navy Achievement Medal and honorably discharged with the rank of Staff Sergeant.



Upon my discharge I moved to Nashville. I had been real active in my church First Baptist, Norfolk, Virginia pastored by Dr Ken Hemphill. I had taught an eighth grade Sunday School class and played in the church orchestra under the direction of Larry White. While there I met a gentleman by the name of Norman Miller. He was a producer and invited me to play on a project entitled "The Young Messiah". It was an ambitious undertaking that featured a veritable who's who in Contemporary Christian music performing a "hip" interpretation of Handel's "Messiah". Norman had coordinated the recording and was now looking to take it on the road that would also include a 100 piece orchestra and 300 voice choir with me playing drums. I had long entertained visions of being a part of the Christian music industry so I jumped at the chance and by the time of our first performance I was settled in Music City, USA.

After the tour was over, I got together with several individuals I attended church with and formed the band "Western Flyer". We would be together a little more than a year before we would sign a record contract and go on to score several top 40 hits on the Country Music charts.

Being in "Western Flyer" represented the ultimate experience for a musician. Driving along in your car and hearing your music played on the radio is definitely a thrill, not to mention



playing before arena sized crowds with the front row singing along with you at the top of their lungs. We would finish shows sometimes and there would be people lined up, hoping to get a picture or an autograph. Our videos played here in the States as well as in Europe. My engagement to my wife was announced in a Country paparazzi magazine with a circulation of over three million subscribers. As a band we were able to do what only a small percentage of people who play an instrument get to do - play on a national level. And I don't think any of us ever lost sight of what an enormous privilege it was.

Yet, the music industry is an exceptionally subjective field. One moment you're confident that in a few years you're going to have your own theater in Branson, next minute you find yourself filling out applications for temporary employment. "Western Flyer" never officially disbanded. It just got to the point where it became obvious we were all going to have to look for other work if we wanted to keep food on the table.

I continued to play in a variety of capacities; studio work, a three week tour in Germany playing for Uncle Sam's finest and any other gigs I could find. In addition, I started a temporary job with LifeWay Christian Resources that would lead to a full time position as a Corporate Trainer.

Working as a Trainer allows me to do something I really enjoy - teach. And while I'm writing out outlines and putting together various programs, my wife stays at home with our little girl who regards the electronic drumset set up in the den as being one of her favorite playthings.

I've been "giving lessons" now for almost two decades. The subject matter hasn't always been the same but the idea of communicating and building has remained a constant. That is the purpose of this book - to communicate and to build. Hopefully now after you've read this section of the book you've got an idea of who I am and my honest desire to aid you in realizing your musical dreams and ambitions. This is just the starting line, obviously. There are several laps to complete before you'll be satisfied but a good beginning is imperative and hopefully you'll find that in this text.

Glad to be working with you...

Bruce D. Gust
Ps 33:3