

## USC Thornton School of Music

### MPWP\_440 Drumset for Classical Percussionists 1 unit

#### Section # 46815 Wednesdays @ 4 PM / Peter Erskine

(Course hours: 1 x 50-minute session per week )

**Course Instructors:** Peter Erskine, Director of Drumset Studies  
**Class Room:** LPB G136  
**Office:** CTV G145  
**Telephone:** 213-740-8142  
**Email:** [perskine@usc.edu](mailto:perskine@usc.edu)

#### LPB G122B ROOM SCHEDULE: (for practice)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9:00 - 9:50	47360 <i>(Johnson)</i>		47360 <i>(Johnson)</i>	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time
10:00 - 10:50	47361 <i>(Johnson)</i>	47364 <i>(Barreiro)</i>	47361 <i>(Johnson)</i>	47366 <i>(Barreiro)</i>	47368 <i>(Barreiro)</i>
11:00 - 11:50	47473 <i>(Johnson)</i> MPPM-340		47473 <i>(Johnson)</i> MPPM-340		
12:00 - 12:50	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time
1:00PM-1:50	47362 <i>(Johnson)</i>	Room available for practice time	47362 <i>(Johnson)</i>	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time
2:00PM - 2:50	47363 <i>(Johnson)</i>	Room available for practice time	47363 <i>(Johnson)</i>	47367 <i>(Barreiro)</i>	Room available for practice time
3:00PM - 3:50	47474 <i>(Serfaty)</i> MPPM340	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time		Room available for practice time
4:00PM - 4:50		47365 <i>(Barreiro)</i>	46815 <i>(ERSKINE)</i> MPWP 440	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time
5:00PM - 5:50	Room available for practice time		Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time	Room available for practice time

#### Course Description

The purpose of this 15-week course is to build upon a basic level of drumming competency, strengthening the foundation upon which any student can increase their understanding of rhythm, promote further mastery of physical and musical coordination, and learn more skills on the drumset. Graduates of this class should expect to be able to play the drums in any number of band and musical settings, with particular emphasis on the students mastering drumset styles and displaying a sense of “ownership” in any performance or audition setting.

*(continued...)*

Students will be tested on the following:

1. Ability to play a variety of basic drumming styles, in the form of specific patterns and beats (performance examination). The musical connecting devices known as “fills” will be studied, tested and graded.
2. Ability to play the drums in an ensemble context, i.e., with other musicians (performance examination). “Comping” (accompaniment) vocabulary will be developed in several genres or styles of music, most importantly jazz and pop.
3. The ability to play basic beats with brushes in jazz and non-jazz styles.
4. A broad and sophisticated level of understanding of the role and development of the drumset in contemporary music (aural and written examination). Music styles other than jazz or pop will be studied, incl Afro-Caribbean and Brazilian drumming styles, Broadway “show” tunes, etc.)
5. Ability to read and understand notated rhythms, and the ability to interpret “typical” drum charts, i.e., music for drumset that is representative of the professional music norm outside of typical orchestral repertoire.
6. The ability to read and interpret written drumset music for standard orchestral repertoire, including such works by Bernstein, Adams, Milhaud, Turnage, et al.

### **Course Materials**

1 pr. Drumsticks for drumset playing (Vic Firth “Big Band” Stick)

1 pr. BRUSHES (suggested model: Vic Firth “Heritage” brush)

“Drumset Essentials, Vol. 3” by Peter Erskine (Alfred Publishing)

“Essential Drum Fills” by Peter Erskine (Alfred Publishing)

*All of these items, i.e., sticks & books, are available from amazon.com, etc.*

The class/course will provide drumsets in the laboratory; kits to be Roland electronic pad kits with teacher-to-individual student communications by way of headsets similar to an electronic keyboard lab. USB “Flash sticks” are recommended! This course will also allow for the use of two acoustic drumsets located in one of the private drumset teaching studios.

### **Grading and Exams**

- **Aural and Written Mid-term examination (25%)** Examination of aural and written materials pertaining to drumming styles and history presented in the first 7 weeks of class.
- **Drumming Skills Exam #1 (25%)** Students must demonstrate a mastery of basic drumming skills on the practice pad as well as drumset “time” playing, i.e., beats that involve the steadiness of tempo and a measure of drumbeat competency.
- **Final Exam/Drumming Skills Exam #2 (50%)** All students will perform in a jury type of setting for the Instructor. They may be asked to play basic drum rudiments on the practice pad, as well as a beat in any of the styles, tempos that

have been studied throughout the semester on the drumset. Drumset chart reading will also be part of the final examination.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is expected for all classes. Attendance for examinations is mandatory. Please review Final Exam schedule in the Schedule of classes to avoid potential conflicts. Three or more unexcused absences will result in a half-grade reduction from the final grade. Five or more unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction.

### **Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

#### **Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

#### **Support Systems**

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides

certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

### **Summary of class structure**

(All descriptions below predicated on the assumption that most students will be right-handed; students will be asked to swap “right” to “left” instructions if they are left-handed; a kit can be set-up to accommodate left-hand students [it should be noted that the choice for a left-hander to set-up and play the kit in reverse is optional and not always practiced by some leading professional/left-handed players); the other option is for the left-handed student to play on a “right-handed” kit utilizing an “open” grip, i.e., the left hand will play the lead rhythms on the hi-hat, etc., while the right hand plays the snare backbeat, etc.)

## **Week 1 / Group A and B**

### **a. Review of Basic Drumming Techniques**

1. Grip (of sticks)
2. Physical relationship to the drumset (promoting efficiency as well as safe drumming habits). Alexander Technique seating health taught.
3. Alternating hand rhythms, with an emphasis on proper technique utilizing a proper combination of arm, wrist and finger involvement and movement.
  - a. SUMMARY: Intro to class: overview presented by Professor Erskine
  - b. How classroom V-drums work, purchase books and sticks for drumset.
  - c. Review of basic pop and jazz beats.
  - d. ACOUSTIC KIT INTRO
  - e. Review of basic techniques (grip, physical relationship to drums, proper stroke technique-arm, wrist, finger); single stroke roll, double-stroke, 8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8 (repeat); flams, drags, ruffs, multiple-stroke rolls (5s, 6s, 7s) on the drumset. ALTERNATE STICKINGS for basic beats (other than L-R-L-R, etc.) will be explored, with a look at how a beat's "feel" can be enhanced by utilizing such alternative stickings.

## **Week 2 / Group A and B**

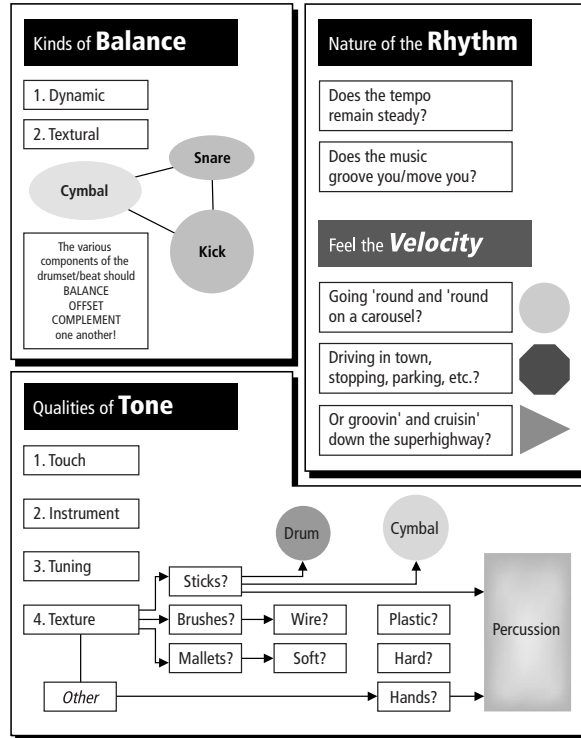
### **TONE PRODUCTION from the cymbal, hi-hat, snare, toms and bass drum**

1. Page 3 of "Drumset Essentials, Vol. 3" ... discussion and use of graph regarding tone production:
2. Cymbal-playing technique
3. Teacher > Student A /B comparisons on sound, examining arm, wrist and finger motion; stick rebound height; the amount of "give" in the hand; consistency of tone
4. Quarter-note to jazz ride pattern exercises on closed hi-hat and open ride...
5. Basic stick/on/hi-hat technique, with left foot pedal open/close timings and techniques
6. Getting the best sound from a drum
7. Examining velocity, stick-height and rebound
8. BALANCE on the entire kit while playing basic jazz and pop beats

The class will LISTEN to notable and differing examples of tone production on the drumset by way of teacher-provided recordings and video demonstrations

**Tone**

Finally, the quality of tone involves the most variables, including *touch* (every drummer's signature), the *sound of the instrument* (sizes of drums, types of heads, choice of cymbals, and even the way the drumset was mic'd and recorded), the *tuning or pitch* of the kit, and the *texture* that the drummer achieves. All of these qualities help to give more of a three-dimensional presence to any drum sound.



This listening template works not only for drummers listening to drummers, but for other instrumentalists and fans as well. I also advise my students to listen to

- a. what the other instruments are doing in support of, or reaction to, the drums. This will make the musical reason for the drummer's specific playing choices more apparent;
  - b. their own tracks, **not** as a drummer but as one of the other instrumentalists. How does it feel—how would "you" enjoy accompanying that drum performance? This takes the "you" out of "you," and allows you to see yourself as others might.
- A good listener makes for a good drummer.

**Week 3 / Group A and B**

**Classroom study and playing of the following:**

FILLS, Jazz 1 ("Essential Drum Fills" text)

Page 10: Triplet-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4+ (i.e., the "and" of beat 4)

Page 11: Triplet-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 1  
Page 12: Triplet-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 1+  
Page 13: Triplet-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 2  
Page 14: Triplet-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 2+  
Page 15: Triplet-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4  
Page 16: Triplet-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4 (w/  
quarter-note set-up)  
Page 17: Sixteenth-note-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4 (w/  
quarter-note set-up)

Group B will work on expanding and creating their own “fills” vocabulary, building upon the exercises above. While stirring on their own creativity, this will show Group A students what is possible and enhance their drive to best-perform these basic building block drumming skills. Inexperienced drummers betray their lack of drumset hours when it comes to fills.

#### **Week 4**

##### **Classroom study and playing of the following:**

FILLS, Jazz 2 (“Essential Drum Fills” text)

Page 18: Sixteenth-note-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4  
Page 19: Sixteenth-note-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 1  
Page 20: Sixteenth-note-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 1+  
Page 21: Sixteenth-note-based fills in 4/4 swing time, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4+  
Page 22: Eighth Notes, Triplets, Sixteenths & Beyond (Advanced fills, jazz context)

Group B will work on expanding and creating their own “fills” vocabulary, building upon the exercises above. While stirring on their own creativity, this will show Group A students what is possible and enhance their drive to best-perform these basic building block drumming skills. Inexperienced drummers betray their lack of drumset hours when it comes to fills.

#### **Week 5**

##### **Classroom study and playing of the following:**

FILLS, Straight 8<sup>th</sup> (Pop) 1 (“Essential Drum Fills” text)

Page 24: Sixteenth-note-based fills in Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4 (w/ quarter-note set-up)  
Page 25: Sixteenth-note-based fills in Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4  
Page 26: Sixteenth-note-based fills in Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 1  
Page 27: Sixteenth-note-based fills in Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 1+

Page 28: Sixteenth-note-based fills in Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4+

Page 29: Sixteenth-note-based fills in Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 2

Group B will work on expanding and creating their own “fills” vocabulary, building upon the exercises above. While stirring on their own creativity, this will show Group A students what is possible and enhance their drive to best-perform these basic building block drumming skills. Inexperienced drummers betray their lack of drumset hours when it comes to fills.

## **Week 6**

### **Classroom study and playing of the following:**

FILLS, Straight 8<sup>th</sup> (Pop) 2

Page 30: 8th-note-based fills/Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4

Page 31: 8th-note-based fills/Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 1

Page 32: 8th-note-based fills/Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 4+

Page 33: 8th-note-based fills/Straight Eighth-Note Feel, Rhythmic Destination Point = 2

Page 34: Fusion-style fills on top of medium-slow VAMP (repeating phrase) ~ from simple to complex!

Group B will work on expanding and creating their own “fills” vocabulary, building upon the exercises above. While stirring on their own creativity, this will show Group A students what is possible and enhance their drive to best-perform these basic building block drumming skills. Inexperienced drummers betray their lack of drumset hours when it comes to fills.

REVIEW of tone production from Class #2 with stylistic/historical overview of the drumset’s evolution and change in sounds aesthetics, etc.

## **Week 7**

Aural and Written Mid Term examination; this exam’s results will comprise 25% of the student’s final grade.

DRUMMING SKILLS EXAM #1 (2<sup>nd</sup> hour)

Students must demonstrate a mastery of basic drumming skills on the practice pad as well as drumset “time” playing along with FILLS from the course of study. Questions will be asked about acoustic drumming, tone production, etc.

Group B performance levels are expected to be at a higher level of skill, confidence and musicality compared to Group A students.

This exam’s results will comprise 25% of the student’s final grade.



## **Week 8**

### **DRUMSET ESSENTIALS 3**

Play-Along performances in class by all students (to strengthen confidence and ability to play “in front of others”). Including “Cats & Kittens,” “Meanwhile,” “Horn of Puento” and/or “Summer’s Waltz” from the jazz realm... will compile list of R&B, pop and rock tracks (play-alongs)

## **Week 9**

### **BRUSHES (Drumset Essentials 3)**

*NB: instruction to take place on acoustic snare drum and kit!*

1. Left Hand & Right Hand basic motions
2. Which direction of hands? Discussion of options and choice ...
3. Legato versus Tap sounds
4. Drumset Essentials 3 pp 9, 10, 11 no “point” or tap
5. Drumset Essentials 3 pp 9, 10, 11 w/ “point” at start of each stroke
6. Pages 12 + 13 w/ discussion of appropriate use of double-time inflection in ballad playing, etc.
7. Drumset Essentials 3 page 14 / up-tempo brush playing / jazz context
8. Rudiments with brushes, pp15, 16 & 17, snare drum and toms, b.d.
9. Non-jazz applications: listening to musical examples and demonstration/teaching of pop beats w/ brushes, introduction to bossa-nova and samba, etc.

Group B will focus on fill and soloing techniques, plus fast-tempo performance.

Group B will also focus on the “less is more” concept of playing (i.e., how to steer a large ensemble without sounding like a bull in a china shop).

## **Week 10**

### **GENRES / STYLES 1 (Drumset Essentials 3)**

**Samba** (pages 19 – 25)

**Bossa-Nova** (pages 26 – 31)

1. discussion of rhythmic subdivision (“feel”) of both styles/genres above
2. ability to accent beat “2” on bass drum while maintaining basic beat with hands and hi-hat, etc.
3. specific beats
4. history and developments of these beats and the music.

## **Week 11**

### **Afro-Caribbean musics**

5. FEEL (pg 33)
6. Clave (pg 34)
7. Salsa (pp 35 – 38)
8. Cha Cha (pg 39)
9. Merengue and Calypso (pp 40-41)

Assign the following pages for reading / study: **Pp. 49 – 69**  
*Group A and B drummers will be encouraged to play alongside one another.*

### **Week 12**

The study of written drumset parts

1. How to read a basic drumset part
2. How to write a basic drumset part

The Percussive Art Society standard of drumset notation (i.e., which part of the kit is notated on which line or space of the musical staff) will be presented and studied.

Handouts will be provided.

“Horn of Puento” “Latin” drum part/chart play-along (Gordon Goodwin big band), application of reading techniques, fills and genre studies ... TD-9 kits for simultaneous exploration, use, etc., pp 42-46

HAND OUT of “THE RHYTHM METHOD” and “WALTZ OF THE FLOWERS” big band drum charts with music (Blackboard download) and study of written style, students can take these home and practice along with them, etc.

Study and analysis of various drum chart writing styles by different composers, used in different settings (big band, small group, recording sessions, i.e., film vs. album vs. jingle vs classical [w/ orchestra], etc.)

Listening homework to orchestral drumset parts and various interpretations...

*Group B drummers will be given audio materials as well as typical “lead sheets” and asked to create and write out appropriate drumset parts for same.*

### **Week 13**

ORCHESTRAL LITERATURE FOR DRUMSET

Bernstein “Symphonic Dances from West Side Story,” “Prelude, Fugue & Riffs”

Turnage “Blood on the Floor,” “Scorched,” “Fractured Lines,” “Erskine”

Adams “Chamber Symphony”

Various “Pops” drumset parts

Discussion of various interpretations from listening homework.

### **Week 14**

SOLOING (Fills book, pp 35 – 41)

Drumset Essentials pp 70 – 74

Use of motifs for developing open solos  
The use of the OSTINATO in solo development  
Elements of improvisational exploration (rhythms either “on” or “off” the beat, dynamics, etc.)

All students will perform a solo in front of the class on the drumset.

## **Week 15**

### **Final Exam (according to Final Exam Schedule in Schedule of Classes)**

#### **Final Exam / DRUMMING SKILLS EXAM #2**

All students will perform in a jury type of setting for the Instructor. They may be asked to a beat in any of the styles, tempos that have been studied throughout the semester on the drumset, incl brush-playing, Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean styles, as well as performing excerpts from orchestra repertoire written for the drumset.

This exam’s results will comprise 50% of the student’s final grade.

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As the intention of this course is to provide a total of two semesters of study and drumset-playing experience for the classical percussionist, the side-by-side presence and overlap of “Group A” and “Group B” students will provide a unique opportunity for the students to learn from one another in addition to receiving instruction from Professors Erskine & Serfaty. The “hard-wiring” of confidence that playing experience provides will be best-won in this class, as drumset-playing opportunities are historically scant for most classical percussionists. The two semester set-up allows this course and its students to achieve the goal of developing musical confidence AND personality at the drumset.

**Practicing:** All students are expected to practice and/or study at least FOUR HOURS per week during the course. The Class Schedule at the beginning of this syllabus shows the available practice time LPB G122B during USC daytime class hours. Please note that your USC ID card will allow you access to the room at all other hours of the night or day, 24-7. Acoustic drumset practice access TBA. The best way to get better is to play. Have fun, and own the music when you play: the “band” is counting on you!