

# PERCUSSIVE NOTES

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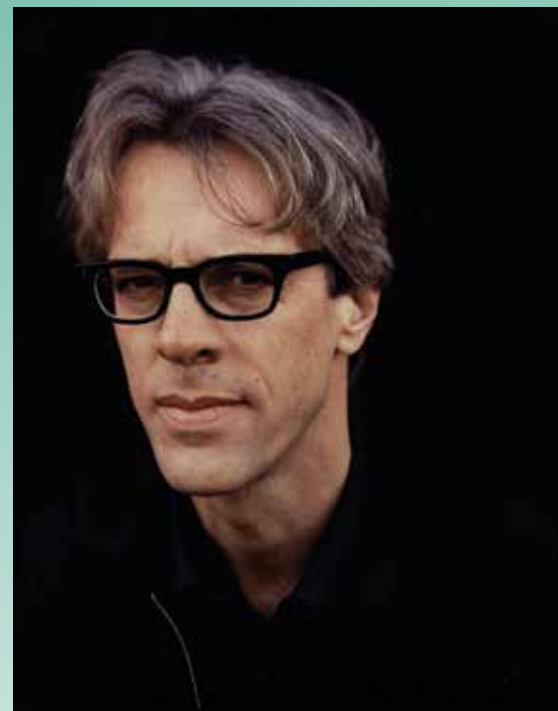
## Gamelan D'Drum

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the symphony...



and the rock star



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# Daring to Drum: the Creation of "Gamelan D'Drum"

The percussion band, the symphony,  
and the rock star

Story and Photos by Lauren Vogel Weiss



(L-R) Stewart Copeland, Doug Howard, John Bryant, Josh Jennings, Ron Snider, and Ed Smith following the performance of "Gamelan D'Drum" with the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra

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What brings a group of percussionists, a major symphony orchestra, and a composer—who may be more widely known for his previous gig in a British rock trio—together? The opportunity to create a new piece of music combining the traditions of the orchestral world with the native music of percussion instruments from around the globe. Our story begins seven years ago, but first let's meet the characters: D'Drum, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra (with Jaap van Zweden, Music Director), and Stewart Copeland.

### D'DRUM (The Musicians)

Ron Snider, John Bryant, Doug Howard, and Ed Smith are the "mad Texans who are D'Drum," as Stewart Copeland affectionately calls them. [Jamal Mohamed was originally part of the ensemble, and now Josh Jennings plays the fifth part when needed.]

Snider, a native Texan who has been a percussionist with the Dallas Symphony since 1970, as well as an active studio musician in North Texas, remembers the early days of the group that he founded 25 years ago. "We bought some Ewe drums from Africa and needed five people to play them. I called some friends and we started getting together once a week."

Those African drums were the beginning of an enormous collection of instruments, most of which are owned by Snider, the group's leader, and are now stored in a house he owns in Palmer, Texas, about 30 miles south of downtown Dallas where most of the "Gamelan D'Drum" rehearsals took place.

"D'Drum ensemble is unique as a percussion group because we do not play traditional repertoire," explains Bryant. "We play our own original compositions, or adaptations of international folk songs. We're more of a 'band'—not a percussion ensemble. D'Drum is different because we cultivated our sound by finding instruments from around the world and then creating a completely new compositional texture with those sounds."

John Bryant, who toured with Ray Charles and the Paul Winter Consort and currently serves as Adjunct Assistant Professor of Drumset Studies and Music Production at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, is also a music producer, composer and

percussionist, and most recently a film director. [See "Dare to Drum" sidebar]

Doug Howard, Principal Percussionist with the Dallas Symphony since 1975, also serves as Adjunct Professor of Music at the Meadows School of the Arts at SMU and is a faculty member of the Aspen Music Festival. "We had always talked about playing together but never had a good place to do it," he explains. "When the Meyerson Symphony Center opened in 1989, there was a nice, large percussion room where we could rehearse and store our instruments. So early in 1990, we started meeting on Monday evenings."

"Nexus was obviously a huge influence on us," adds Ed Smith, a jazz musician who teaches vibraphone and gamelan at the University of North Texas and also teaches at SMU. "For a long time, I had wanted to be a part of a world music band. This was my first experience with Ewe drumming, but we soon realized our left hands were so bad we had to stop playing Ewe-style music!" He pauses to laugh. "But it was a great reason for us to get together. And it's been a very special brotherhood."

Jamal Mohamed is the Director of the Meadows World Music Ensemble at SMU (where he is on the faculty with Bryant, Howard, and Smith) and the co-founder of the award-winning Middle Eastern jazz ensemble Beledi. A native of Lebanon whose family moved to the Chicago area when he was five, Mohamed returned to his homeland in 1965 to play in a band, the same time that Stewart Copeland was growing up in Beirut as a self-proclaimed "diplo-brat" (before he went to boarding school in London). Although they did not meet until D'Drum brought them together



decades later, they are both drummers with Middle Eastern influences. "My preference is to always play by ear," Mohamed said in a recent interview. "To play by feel; to play by intuition. That's the way I started and I'm still like that."

Although Josh Jennings was only ten years old when D'Drum was founded (and already a member of the Marcus High School percussion program in Flower Mound, Texas), he earned his "world chops" with two degrees from the University of North Texas in Denton. "José Aponte [UNT Senior Lecturer in drumset and Latin percussion] and Ed Smith were very influential in my career choices," he says. "I first heard D'Drum play in 2000 and even served as a stagehand for a couple of their shows. In the years that followed, the guys and I became more familiar with each other through side gigs and casual hangs, and in 2012 they invited me play with their band." Besides being a freelance percussionist in the DFW area, Jennings is also the Percussion Director at MacArthur High School in Irving, Texas.

The members of D'Drum started working on their own music, much of it improvised. They performed their first public concert at the Dallas Museum of Art in 1992 as part of the ongoing Bancroft Concert Series and performed there again in October of 2013, sharing their special blend of world percussion. D'Drum also recorded the soundtrack for the National Geographic Television film *Lions of Darkness* in 1992 and has performed Showcase Concerts at PASIC 2000 in Dallas and PASIC 2006 in Austin.

"For a while, we performed very little, maybe once a year," remembers Howard. "We enjoyed getting together to play music, yet performing was not the main objective." But after a 2007 performance by D'Drum during one of the Dallas Symphony's gala events for its patrons and supporters, they received an unexpected invitation.

"We got such a wonderful reception that the executive director of the orchestra said it would be nice to have a piece written for the Dallas Symphony and D'Drum, so they commissioned a concerto for the group," Snider recalls. "They asked us to look for a composer, which we did."

"It was suggested that we meet with Schirmer Publishing in New York, the largest classical music publisher in the world," Bryant continues. "They mentioned Stewart Copeland. I was aware of Stewart as a composer but I also knew he was on a reunion tour with The Police that summer [2008], and it didn't enter my mind that he was a possibility."

Howard was the only member of the group not familiar with Copeland. "I pretty much stopped listening to popular music when I graduated from high school because I was so busy learning my craft, going to school, taking auditions, and then being involved in daily rehearsals and performances. I had heard of The Police, and even Sting, but I didn't really know Stewart's name. Strange as that may sound to some people, when his name came up, I really didn't know who that was. But I do now!"

Copeland remembers the phone call from John Bryant: "Out of the blue, he asked, 'Would you like to compose a piece for gamelan and the Dallas Symphony?' Or at least that's what I thought I'd heard! It took a very short amount of time to answer that question. So in September of 2008, I went to Dallas and met with the five mad Texans who are D'Drum. And our two-and-a-half year journey began there."

# Dare to Drum

With such a high-profile composer (Stewart Copeland) and a planned world premiere during Super Bowl week in Dallas, John Bryant made the wise decision to begin filming the creative process of "Gamelan D'Drum."

"Since I've been working in film as a music producer and composer, I know other people in the film production world," Bryant explains. "I called a couple of cameramen and said, 'I don't have any money, but it would be great if you want to come and record this because I think there could be a film here.' So my pals came in and we shot the first meeting, all of the rehearsals with Stewart, the recording session, even the concert itself. It grew as a labor of love."

At the time, he did not know of the drama that would unfold due to the inclement winter weather in Dallas the week of the premiere, which would eventually provide an unplanned story line for the soon-to-be documentary. "When the concert was over," Bryant continues, "I had all this footage but no money to make the film, so we thought about Kickstarter. One of the first things I did was call Stewart to make sure he was on board with the idea, which he was. It took longer than I thought to prepare a short promotional video, as well as a budget so we would know how much money we needed to raise. It wasn't until October 2013 that we launched the 35-day campaign and raised a little over \$95,000 from 348 people around the world. That was probably harder than making the film itself."

Once the funding was there, the next thing to do was interview everyone involved. "I had to prepare a list of questions that would follow the story I had in mind," remembers Bryant. "And I was advised to structure a three-act play, complete with tension, as well as highs and lows. Then I had to craft questions to create that drama. I went to Los Angeles and did the first interview with Stewart; I hit him with a bunch of questions and just let him take off. Then I had a filmmaker friend of mine, Ginny Martin, interview everyone in the group, including me. The only person missing was the Maestro [Jaap van Zweden], and I didn't know if we would be able to get him to sit for an interview because of his incredibly busy schedule. But in June 2014, the last week of the symphony's season, he gave us an hour's notice that he had a little time that afternoon. We rushed down to the Meyerson with a camera and got the interview. Once we did that, I knew we really had a film because Maestro is so dynamic and smart, and he said so many great things; it really brought the whole film together."

During the interview, van Zweden recalled his days as the

concertmaster in the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. "I still see the timpani player in the middle of the orchestra... I always had the feeling he was the 'king of the orchestra' and he and the first percussion player were the backbone of the orchestra. Don't forget, an orchestra without real rhythm, without the feel of rhythm, is a mediocre orchestra... [Those instruments] are more important than we all realize."

Because Bryant knew all the interview questions, all the music, and all the footage, he wound up doing the editing and crafted the flow of the story with the visual images and the music. "I was really more of an organizer because the story was there. One of my editor friends really helped me when he said, 'Just let the music lead the way.' And I did." Not only was Bryant the editor, but he also served as the writer, director, and producer.

"It's totally his movie," agrees Copeland. "I was just a sounding board for John. He would bounce ideas off me and I would make a few suggestions. Not only did he cut it and make a film out of it, but he produced it as well, which was a *monumental* mountain to climb. I was very impressed with him as both a producer *and* an artist, and he came up with a pretty unbelievable product."

*Dare to Drum*—the behind-the-scenes story of what happened when the five accomplished percussionists in D'Drum joined forces with their rock star composer and the Dallas Symphony to create "Gamelan D'Drum"—premiered at the Ninth Annual Dallas International Film Festival on April 16, 2015. The "stars" of the film—Ron Snider, Bryant, Doug Howard, Ed Smith, and Jamal Mohammed, as well as the composer—were in attendance at the



Video Trailer: "Dare to Drum"  
<https://vimeo.com/131680052>

Angelika Film Center in Dallas for the movie premiere and a repeat showing on April 18.

"The response was overwhelming," says Bryant regarding the two screenings of the film. "Of course, it was a lopsided audience. There were a lot of friends and family, as well as people who love D'Drum and people that care about the symphony, plus people who love Stewart Copeland and The Police. Having it all come together in your hometown was fulfilling in a way that just goes beyond words."

"John really hit it out of the ballpark," comments Ed Smith, who provided footage from his many trips to Bali over the years. "It covers our story, which I'm really proud of—but then, it's also funny!"

"I think the film has something for everyone, both percussionists and non-musicians alike," observes Snider. "One of my favorites parts of the film is the first appearance of Maestro van Zweden and the expression of his intensity. And be sure to stay through the credits; it's worth the wait!"

"I think Jaap stole the show," Copeland says with a grin.

Doug Howard adds, "John did an amazing job of crafting together all of the footage that we had, going back to the very first meeting with Stewart Copeland. It has tension and it has humor. It tells a great story, and people seem to identify with it in a positive way."

Bryant is talking with film reps and distributors in New York and Los Angeles as well as investigating different ways that people can access the film. "We're hoping to hatch a plan to release the film to the general public through DVDs and Blu-rays in addition to the broad digital distribution system of iTunes, Amazon, and Netflix. We just have to figure out the best way to get the film out there."

Fortunately for those who will be attendance at PASIC this November, excerpts of the film will be screened during a session at the convention, and the film will be shown in its entirety at a nearby cinema in downtown San Antonio.





## STEWART COPELAND (The Composer)

Stewart Copeland describes himself as a “more patriotic American” upon his return to the States following his formative years spent abroad. “And somewhere along the way, I got interested in music!” Copeland considers himself primarily a composer, although millions of fans fondly remember him during his nine years as the drummer with The Police, who were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003. In addition to scoring films (for high profile movies such as *Wall Street* and *Rumblefish*), writing operas (*Holy Blood and Crescent Moon* for the Cleveland Opera and *The Tell-Tale Heart* for the Royal Opera in London), and composing concertos—such as “Gamelan D’Drum,” premiered in Dallas in 2011, and “The Tyrant’s Crush,” to be premiered in Pittsburgh next year—he also performs with his “high-falutin’ fine arts quintet” called Off the Score. [Other members of that quintet include internationally renowned pianist Jon Kimura Parker, Metropolitan Opera violinist Yoon Kwon, up-and-coming young bassist Marlon Martinez, and EVI (Electronic Valve Instrument) virtuoso Judd Miller.]

“D’Drum had a lot of input as far as the instrumentation in the concerto because these were instruments that we owned and had been playing for quite a while,” explains Snider, “but it was Stewart who actually decided on using so many Indonesian instruments.” One of the instruments that intrigued Copeland was the ensemble’s gamelan, a collection of gongs, metallophones and drums native to the islands of Bali and Java in Indonesia, including *bonang*, *gender*, and *reyong*. [See “About the Instruments” sidebar]

“As Ron says in the film,” adds Smith, “Stewart thought the gamelan was sexy, so he really wanted to emphasize that part. That is why the title of the concerto is ‘Gamelan D’Drum.’ We had a two-octave chromatic *reyong* (25 gongs, F to F, set up like a traditional keyboard) custom built through our gamelan maker, Wayan Pager, in Bali. A traditional gamelan is usually just a pentatonic scale, but we had this one made chromatic so we could play just about any melody that Stewart would throw at us.”

“After we decided to go with the Indonesian ‘motif,’ as it were, we were still free to add other things,” Snider continues. “As the piece developed, we kept thinking of other places it could go, different kinds of textures it could use, and we started adding things like the *amadinda* [African xylophone] and African drums. He also wrote some parts for the [Hungarian] *cimbalom* because he knew it was completely chromatic and could play all the notes that we needed.”

As a *cimbalom* soloist, Snider has performed and recorded with many major American orchestras, including Dallas, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Toronto, and he has been a featured soloist at the World Cimbalom Congress in Hungary. Copeland also added more “traditional” percussion instruments, such as a marimba and vibraphone, but the glockenspiel parts did not make the final cut. “I believe I counted 78 instruments on stage for the performance,” Snider says with a smile.

Copeland explains how he learned about all the various instruments in the D’Drum arsenal: “I went around and filmed every single bar, bell, or object with a little video camera and got



(L–R) Snider on *cimbalom*, Mohamed on *dombek*, Howard on *marimba*, Bryant on “world kit,” and Smith on *vibes* during an early rehearsal of “Gamelan D’Drum”







Josh Jennings playing the polyphonic drums at the beginning of the third movement

an audio recording of what each one did so I knew what pitches were available to me to compose around. I assigned each sample to a key in my composing software back in my lab. When I'm working with that little strange seven-note Javanese instrument whose name I can't pronounce, I know what those seven available notes are. And since I had an audio recording of it, it's not just a matter of the pitch, but the 'unpitch' as well; the 'detuning' is a very critical atmospheric component of each instrument.

"The way the gamelan bells work is that they're slightly detuned," he continues. "Two parallel bars are playing almost the same note, but there's a *slight* variation so that the sound waves create a 'wah-wah' effect. [The female instrument is tuned seven cycles per second lower than the male one.] Instead of saying, 'That's an F-sharp,' it's *kind of* an F-sharp. When I use that not-quite F-sharp key assignment on my keyboard, I can hear that as well as the other concert-pitched instruments, such as oboes, flutes, brass, or strings. Then I have to find an envelope that will go with that slightly wrong F-sharp. And believe it or not, it can be done!"

"It was a true collaboration," Bryant adds. "That's why it was so unique and so satisfying. Stewart was willing to collaborate with us, and because he was a drummer, we all spoke the same language."

### GAMELAN D'DRUM (The Concerto)

Was this composition experience different than other pieces Copeland has written? "One thing was the instruments available and the other was the players playing them," Copeland replies. "The instruments are very exotic. Writing for gamelan is very different than writing for classical orchestra. The strange pitches and dissonances work on paper, they work in my lab, but are they actually going to work on stage? Those were challenges that had to be overcome that were unique to this particular concerto. But the *most* important distinction of this piece is the five guys in

D'Drum, who are wildly creative chart-reading improvisers! It's a rare thing; they can read batshit on the page, but they can also improvise. Much of this piece was comprised of finding 'cool tricks' that they do, like the rice log [*lesung*], for instance. They learned a cool rhythm from the rice-pounding ladies of Bali, and I used that and wrote an orchestral envelope around it. Or I could put '16 bar darabuka improvisation' in the score. I can't do that with the Liverpool Symphony, where I have to write out every note. There was a lot of give and take with D'Drum. What's unique about this concerto is that I'm writing a giant orchestral piece that is all about the score on the page, but the central element of it is a high degree of improvisation."

The 35-minute "concerto for world percussion" (as it is subtitled) consists of three movements: "Klentong," "Taksu," and "Lesung," named for the gamelan instruments and culture. The piece begins as the five percussionists "march" into the theater and onto the stage playing *beleganjur*, the marching music of Bali (loosely translated to mean "gamelan of walking warriors.") Bryant and Jennings lead the way, playing interlocking parts on *ceng-ceng kopyak*, the small hand cymbals used in ceremonial Balinese music, followed by Snider and Howard on differently tuned Balinese *kendang* double-headed drums (with the male drum tuned to a higher pitch than the female drum), then by Smith playing two gongs mounted on a portable rack before he proceeds to the *reyong*.

Soon after the orchestra joins the five soloists, Bryant and Howard move behind the conductor to play the Balinese *gender*, a diatonic (seven-note) bronze-key instrument that D'Drum had custom-made to Western pitch. Then Snider begins to play on the *cimbalom* while Bryant and Jennings join Smith on the *reyong* on the left side of the stage as Howard moves to the marimba and then the *ceng-ceng ricik* (small, thick cymbals from Bali mounted on a wooden "turtle" base). Confused yet?

"The choreography was problematic," concedes Snider. "We're all playing different instruments at different times. I spent



Ron Snider playing the cimbalom



many an hour figuring out stage setups—how to fit everything in so it would flow smoothly. When we rehearsed in the studio, we set up the instruments pretty much like it would be onstage, except instead of having a long, straight stage, we'd elbow it off to another room. We would play the piece over and over while moving to the different setups. It's not just how to get to the other instruments, but how to get there without tripping over John or Doug on the way! We only had a few moments to get to the next instrument, so the choreography was very important."

Immediately to the conductor's right, Bryant plays his "world kit." "I'm a drumset player first," Bryant explains. "The drumset is primarily made up of barrel drums from West Africa that the Ewe people used in their *gahu* dance traditions. We took the biggest drum, called the *gboba*, and made a bass drum out of it. The rest of the smaller Ewe drums surround me, almost 'standing up,' along with a snare drum. Instead of playing hi-hat with my left foot, I mounted a shekere on the hi-hat stand to give it an African sound. And I don't use any cymbals because we found that they take up too much aural space and cover up other sounds.

"I really like playing the first movement because it's constantly changing," Bryant continues. "We're all moving from one instrument to another. Even though it's the shortest movement, only about nine minutes, it's got fast parts and slow parts and ends in an exciting way."

The second movement, "Taksu," (the spiritual power found in music), opens with sounds of "rice paddy frogs" spread throughout the orchestra while Howard tilts an imposing, nine-foot tall rainstick as the others move to the Javanese instruments on the right side of the stage. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, Snider sits in front of a *gambang* (a pentatonic, trough-style wooden-bar xylophone), Smith in front of a *bonang* (a Javanese gamelan set up in two strips of five gongs each), and Jennings in front of a Javanese-style *kendang* (large double-headed barrel drum). Howard plays a *saron* (small bronze-keyed metallophone) and Bryant plays six hanging gongs.



John Bryant playing gong Java



Doug Howard playing the saron

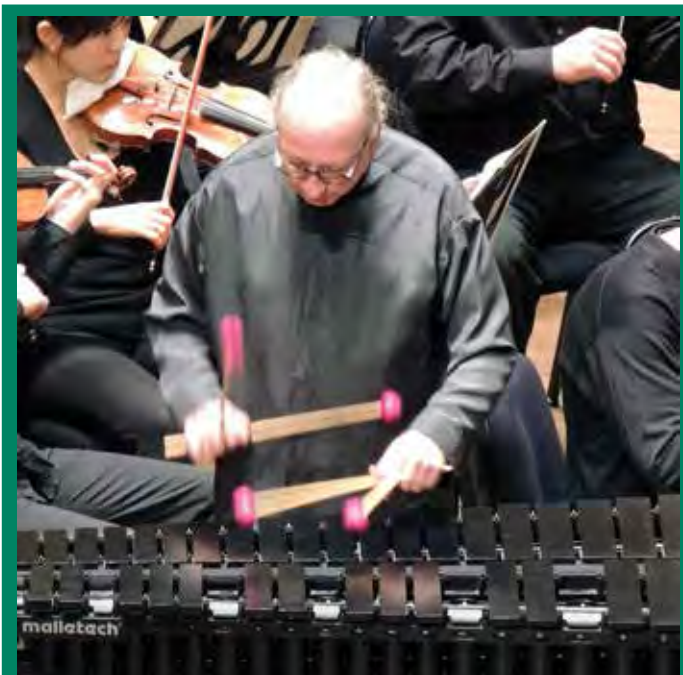
Snider, Smith, and Jennings then turn to play different sets of three Sundanese *kendang*, from the western part of Java (large double-headed barrel drums whose pitch is modulated with the heel of the left foot). "There's one large drum in the middle and two smaller drums on the left and right," Snider explains. "There are two opposing heads, a high and a low, on the large drum.

"I love the second movement," Snider adds, "which is based on a Western Javanese song, 'Udang Mas,' that we learned from my daughter Chelsea, who learned it while she was studying gamelan at the College of Santa Fe. D'Drum took that melody and extrapolated a few things. It's a piece we've been doing for several years. We played it for Stewart, and he decided to expand on it and wrote the orchestral parts around it."

The second movement is also Howard's favorite. "The Javanese instruments get a chance to speak. It's a delightful tune and Stewart's orchestration is beautiful. The violin solo and the cello solo are a big part of that movement, and they're just lovely. It's gorgeous writing—a real contrast to the outer two movements, which are more energetic and vigorous. Stewart was really collaborative in the whole process, especially in this movement."

"I really like the exposition of our Sundanese *kendang* drumming in the second movement because I finally get to play some drums!" Smith says with a laugh. "Until then, I look like I'm a 'nob-gong specialist' because I play a lot of *reyong*. The Sundanese *kendang* drum is one of my favorite drums in the world. We also get to vocalize a bit using the words 'cak' [from the Balinese vocal gamelan 'kecak'], which sounds like the slap on the *kendang*, and 'doi,' which to me is the open sound of the highest *kendang*."

"My favorite moment of the entire concerto is the very last seconds of the middle movement when you just hear the orchestra chord and the rainstick," Snider says as he closes his eyes and nods his head. "The audience is holding its breath and waiting for that last little bit of rain to fall. It's a very nice delicate moment."



Ed Smith playing the "Love Vibe"

The third movement opens with a brief improvised hand drum solo featuring Jennings on some unique hourglass-shaped drums. Even though the piece was written with Mohamed in mind, Josh brings his own personality, as well as some non-Indonesian instruments, to the performance. "I received a set of [Taiwanese] *polyphonic* drums from Cadeson during PASIC 2012," Jennings explains. "When the guys saw and heard the drums, we decided that they would be perfect for my contribution during this introduction to 'Lesung.' Later in this movement, I have a duet with John where he plays [Egyptian] *riq* and I play [Brazilian] *pandeiro*. We felt that the contrasting styles of two tambourines would be a unique modification from the original part, both visually and audibly. I also play a Peruvian cajon during the mallet duo between Doug and Ed." In this section, Bryant is playing his West African drumset, Howard is playing on a four-octave rosewood marimba, and Smith is on a Mallettech Love Vibe, with Snider back on *cimbalom*.

One of the main highlights in the final movement is the trio—Howard, Smith, and Jennings—playing the namesake of the movement. "In Bali," Snider explains, "several ladies would literally pound rice in a big trough with large poles. It is called *lesung*, and Stewart liked that name so much he named the last movement after it. The simple, interlocking rhythms circle around each other with variations, sort of a four-against-three feel." They are "accompanied" by Snider and Bryant on *amadinda*. "It's a large-key Ugandan xylophone. I play on one side and John plays on the other."

Soon all five are playing a djembe quintet. "When we're all playing together and really connected, those are fantastic moments," says Jennings. "The feeling you get when the orchestra is in sync and the five of us are improvising in close proximity, doing what D'Drum does best—that's really special."

As the piece builds to a frenetic climax, Snider and Howard are back on the diatonic *gender* while the other three play the *reyong*. "This is where we were able to use true Balinese-style

interlocking rhythms between the three of us," Smith explains, "and, because it is a chromatic *reyong*, we were able to move that interlocking through Stewart's interesting chord changes, which couldn't be done with the usual pentatonic scheme. It's very exciting to be able to do that." All five percussionists switch to drums for the final syncopated accents with the orchestra.

"The only instruments [in the concerto] that I knew how to play before D'Drum were the *pandeiro* and cajon," Jennings admits with a sheepish smile. "Even though I was one of the first gamelan students at North Texas, I only had a little instruction on the *gender wayang* and *kendang* from Ed (and CalArts Professor I. Nyoman Wenten). So the whole experience of being in this group and playing this piece has massively expanded my scope of abilities and instruments."

With all the world instruments and rhythms, how would Copeland describe the finished concerto? "There's more to it than just the instruments and exotic elements," he says. "It's an American piece written by an American composer."

### DALLAS, CLEVELAND, AND CORPUS CHRISTI

To date, D'Drum has performed its namesake concerto three times, with a fourth (and fifth) performance scheduled with the San Antonio Symphony during PASIC 2015 this November. Even though the five percussionists learned to play all the instruments in the authentic styles and "improvised" some of their parts, it is all written out. "I figured out what they're doing and put it on the page," explains Copeland, "because the conductor needs to know what they're doing. They are not looking at that page; they've learned it and memorized it. But it is on the score."

The world premiere was scheduled for February 3–5, 2011 in Dallas. "The first time we ran through the piece with Maestro Jaap van Zweden was on the Monday before we were supposed to rehearse with the [Dallas Symphony] Orchestra," remembers Snider. "He was conducting it and watching how we moved and



Jamal Mohamed on doumbek during a rehearsal of "Gamelan D'Drum" in May 2010



played the parts. Not knowing what his response was going to be, one of my great memories is when he turned around and said, 'It's fantastic!' Snider laughs at the memory. "All that stress and worry about how he would respond to the piece melted away."

But what didn't melt away was the winter weather that paralyzed the North Texas area for the next few days. Anyone who watched Super Bowl XLV (February 6, 2011) will remember the ice and snow that covered the stadium and surrounding areas.

"After our Monday evening rehearsal with Jaap, we all felt like this was going to be great," adds Howard. "Then on Tuesday morning, we woke up to the ice storm and the rehearsal was cancelled. It was very depressing. We took advantage of the day with no orchestra and got a lot of work done on stage. And then the same thing happened on Wednesday. Thursday was a good day, because we finally got to rehearse with the orchestra."

Bryant remembers that Thursday rehearsal. "The first time we played with the orchestra was kind of shocking to us because the orchestra was not nearly as loud as we were expecting them to be. We had been rehearsing with a synthesized recording that Stewart had made for us, so we had adjusted the volume of the 'orchestra' to match our drums. But when we got to the first orchestra rehearsal, we realized we were playing too loud.

"We were also concerned about the piece staying together with all the polyrhythms going back and forth across the

stage," he continues. "Rhythmically, it was a real challenge for the orchestra because of the interlocking rhythms, which is an important part of Balinese and Javanese music. But they did it and they did it well. Most importantly, we had a great conductor keeping it all together."

Although Snider and Howard play regularly with the DSO, Bryant and Smith (and Mohamed and Jennings) are not orchestral players. "That first rehearsal was pretty intimidating because we were just trying to find the conductor's beat," Smith recalls. "Because I wasn't reading music—it was all internalized—I just stared a hole through Jaap the whole time. Since I never play with a conductor, this was a rare opportunity, and I felt like a real orchestral player for a few days!"

How did the composer, who was in Dallas that week, react to the circumstances caused by the weather? "By keeping calm and being optimistic," Copeland says with a smile. "And remembering that the journey is most of the event; the concert at the end is just the punctuation. It was the two years I spent with those five *madmen* that was the adventure."

Unfortunately, another snowstorm cancelled the Friday rehearsal as well as the performances scheduled for Thursday and Friday nights. "At that point, it really looked like it wasn't going to happen," Howard says, still emotional, even years later, at the unfortunate turn of events. "We did get another rehearsal in



(L-R) Jennings, Smith, Howard, Snider, and Bryant playing a djembe quintet in the final movement of "Gamelan D'Drum" with the Cleveland Orchestra

late on Saturday afternoon, and the concert went amazingly well considering the short rehearsal time we had. It was great to play with my orchestra, and we received an amazing reaction from the hometown crowd. I was very proud of that performance."

"It was new, fresh—great energy," van Zweden stated in the *Dare to Drum* documentary. "That's why I think this was, and of course still is, an absolutely great piece. The music pulled us through that weekend."

As Scott Cantrell wrote in his review of the program for *The Dallas Morning News*, "The audience fairly exploded Saturday night in the most uproarious ovation I can remember at a Dallas Symphony classical concert.... It's a tribute to DSO musicians and music director Jaap van Zweden, as well as D'Drum, that a tricky piece was capably assembled on a shortened rehearsal schedule."

Twenty months would pass before D'Drum played the piece again, this time with the Cleveland Orchestra, under the direction of James Feddeck, on October 5, 2012. "Cleveland was really special to me because I studied with Cloyd Duff [former timpanist of the Cleveland Orchestra]," says Howard. "Our dressing room at Severance Hall was the [former music director] George Szell library where some of his scores were on display in a glass case. It was a pleasure to be in that space."

"Playing with the Cleveland Orchestra was really a great honor because they're such a fantastic orchestra," adds Snider. "They played our concerto with such a beautiful sound."

"That band can play!" Smith says with a laugh, referring to the Cleveland Orchestra. "They are so strong rhythmically and their sound—wow! The experience of playing that piece in their

beautiful hall was one of the highest moments of my life."

Daniel Hathaway, reviewer for ClevelandClassical.com, called the piece "a fascinating, partially-improvised percussion-fest brilliantly... played by the five Dallas drummers... you had to admire the concept and be wowed by the collective prowess of the five soloists. The audience loved it, responding with an ecstatic standing ovation."

D'Drum's third performance of Copeland's concerto was this past February 21 with the Corpus Christi Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of John Giordano. "I think this one was the most satisfying, musically," Bryant states. "We were still trying to get it under our hands for the first couple of concerts, and by the time we got to Corpus, we all knew the piece. Now you're playing from your heart rather than your head, and that's where you want to be."

"My favorite performance was the last one, too," Copeland agrees. "I love the Dallas Symphony, and that was a great performance. But D'Drum themselves just know the piece better every time they play it. And the five of them *killed* it in Corpus Christi. They own that piece now!"

"I loved that Corpus Christi orchestra," he continues. "I've realized in my journeys through orchestras across the land that I actually prefer three rehearsals with a provincial orchestra than one rehearsal with an alpha orchestra. I try to make my music as easy to play as possible, but sometimes the rhythms are tricky. Three-against-four can look like hell on the page, but as soon as they figure it out, which usually takes a couple of rehearsals, it sounds beautiful. Rehearsal trumps technique."

Ron Snider concurs. "The Corpus Christi Symphony played



D'Drum performing "Taksu" in Corpus Christi (back row, L–R) Howard and Bryant playing sarons, (front row, L–R) Jennings, Snider, and Smith on Sundanese kendangs



it beautifully. They're mostly younger players than the other two [orchestras], and they brought a sense of excitement. And now that we've played it a few times, we know what to expect and know how to interrelate with the orchestra better."

## SAN ANTONIO

For the first time since its premiere, "Gamelan D'Drum" will be performed twice by the same orchestra on two consecutive nights, in the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts in San Antonio on November 13–14. Copeland will once again be in attendance, as he has for all the previous performances. The concerts are not official PASIC events, but discount tickets for the Friday concert will be available to PASIC attendees.

"This will probably be the most fun audience of all," Copeland says with a grin. "Man, a room full of drummers? Are you kidding me?! When the guys get out there with all their cool stuff, that's going to be a blast."

"I'm looking forward to these concerts," admits Howard. "There will be a number of our percussion friends from around the country in attendance. Plus just being around the 'PASIC vibe'."

"It will be great to perform this piece again, especially for two new sets of audiences back-to-back," adds Jennings. "For me, every opportunity to play music and share my thoughts and ideas—and myself—with an audience is always special. I'm so lucky to have this moment—and to be able to call this my job."

Looking back on this project, what do the members of D'Drum remember the most about their association with Copeland? "He was so easy to work with," Snider replies. "Not just because he's a drummer but because he is primarily a film composer. As a film composer, you can't take that much possession of the notes you've written because they have to be approved by other people. Stewart was able to *drum* something out dispassionately but still willing to make changes if it didn't work."

"There was always music flowing out of him," agrees Smith, "but at the same time, he would pause and listen to our ideas and make them work within his music. I'm also very impressed with what a blast he is having with life!"

"The entire process has been an experience that I would have never imagined," Jennings says with his usual grin. "He is one of those drumming icons—or should I say *music* icons?—that I never thought I would have an opportunity to meet. I have been able to hear Stewart speak about how he gets inspired and how he composes, as well as watch him interact with both the orchestra and the group. This has been a very unique and special experience for a kid from Flower Mound!"

"'Gamelan D'Drum' is a piece that bridges a gap between the usual classical music audience and a wider audience of people who love music but may not be regular attendees at classical performances," adds Howard. "Stewart's been great, and we've all gotten to know each other pretty well. It's almost like he's an honorary member of D'Drum."

Copeland seems surprised—and touched—by that comment. "I'm very honored to be considered thus. I certainly feel like they're family now. It's been a long journey and we're all pretty close at this point. The feeling is mutual."

Bryant sums up the past five years: "All of these great things happened because we simply love playing the drums. That love sent us around the world to pursue our dream, and when we came back home and created our own sound, all of these wonderful circumstances came together, like what's going to happen in San Antonio. You can't make that happen. All we can do is put our heads down and love this music and play it the best way we can." For more info go to [www.puredrum.com](http://www.puredrum.com). **PN**

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