

Chapter 6

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Conclusion

This study set out to show that Nexus' innovative contribution to contemporary percussion has been founded on the bedrock of percussion and other musical traditions that the members inherited from their teachers as well as from the orchestral environments within which their teachers and they themselves worked. This is not to detract in any way from the unique and innovative contributions that Nexus has made not only to the development of the percussion ensemble but also to concert music in the late twentieth century. Rather it shows that progressive musical practices do not necessarily arise out of uncompromising dissociations from past practices.

The study has investigated Nexus' innovative approach to making music through an examination of the ensemble's formation and development, the musical and social connections that brought the members together, and their explorations of diverse musical practices and traditions. The ensemble's musical aesthetics and concepts of sound may be traced to the musical traditions of Philadelphia and Rochester, where the majority of the members were trained.

This is the first major study of Nexus, and it examines the ensemble in the context of musical transmission and the importance of values and ideas drawn from the past. The unearthing of primary material from diverse private and public sources is a significant dimension of this study, as is the charting of the Philadelphia Orchestra percussion tradition and its importance in the development of that orchestra under the leadership of Stokowski and Ormandy. The latter finding draws attention to the broader impact that percussion has had on the development of concert music in the twentieth century, and to its neglect in musicological study.

At the outset, this study presented the seeming paradox that Nexus has created a new tradition while simultaneously continuing traditions from the past. Demonstrating Nexus' connection to the Philadelphia percussion tradition, and showing how its key elements have been relocated within a new, exploratory context, is one of the main results of the study. Through this, the paradox recedes: although Nexus has been innovative in its approach to music, and although some of the features of this approach can be said to constitute a new tradition in chamber music, this new tradition is also deeply rooted in past tradition. As Henry Glassie says: 'Tradition is the creation of the future out of the past.'¹ But this past tradition is not stagnant nor conservative; instead, it leans more to the creative edge. Traditions change as circumstances take their course. This is a natural process as each generation builds on the past.

In the case of Nexus, the ensemble has added to the musical traditions of Philadelphia by integrating them with other traditions of the world to create a new direction for percussion. This shows the dialogic principle at work. Instead of passively absorbing the authoritative discourse of past traditions, Nexus has transformed them into something living, innovative,

¹ Henry Glassie, 'Tradition,' *The Journal of American Folklore*, 108 (430), Common Ground: Keywords for the Study of Expressive Culture, Autumn 1995, p. 395.

and evolving. Thus, I argue that whilst acknowledging Wyre and Hartenberger's view that Nexus has created a new tradition, we must also acknowledge that Nexus is taking the next step forward in the traditions established by its forebears.

This path that Nexus has taken has been based upon a productive engagement with tradition, and has not been an obstacle to the members' creative and exploratory spirit. Indeed, this dialogue between tradition and innovation has provided a model for a new generation of creative musicians. Engelman's statement that Nexus 'was a conversation born of thirty years' may be extended to mean a conversation that took place across time as well as between creative individuals.²

The study is the result of intensive immersion in contemporary percussion practice through participation and observation within Nexus' orbit of activity, and through practice as a percussionist and teacher. However, whilst intimate contact of this kind has yielded fruitful findings on the issue of transmission, influence, and social-musical relationships, attention now needs to be directed at locating Nexus within the broader context of North American musical and cultural history.

In addition, studies that attempt to position Nexus within the more specific context of developments in the percussion ensemble would provide further insights into the notion of musical community and stylistic development. There are many other potential areas for further research, such as exploring the relationship between Nexus' *modus operandi* and its music per se, or examining more comprehensively the Philadelphia percussion tradition, particularly in relation to the role of key players like Schwar and Podemski. Stokowski's and Ormandy's roles in the development of this tradition are also worthy of attention. Likewise, Street deserves further study. It is hoped that the present study has made some contribution in this regard, and has made some advance in the understanding of the complex relationship between tradition and innovation in the musical life of one of the most unique and important chamber ensembles of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

² Engelman, Interview with author, 9 August 1999.

Appendices

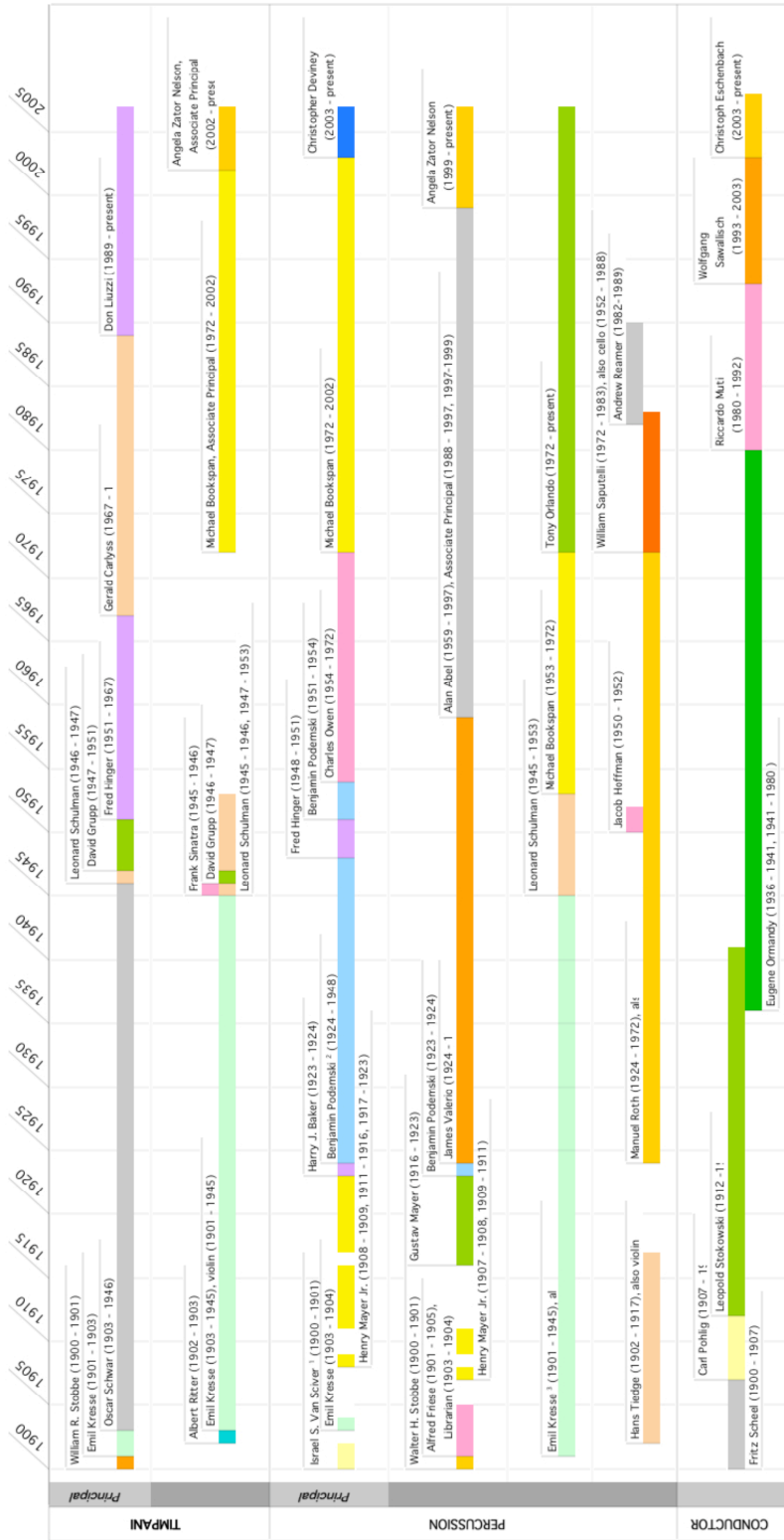
The Philadelphia Orchestra

Appendix 1: Philadelphia Orchestra percussion sections 1900-2006

Appendix 2: Philadelphia Orchestra section percussionists

- A. Oscar Schwar
- B. Benjamin Podemski
- C. James Valerio
- D. Fred Hinger
- E. Michael Bookspan
- F. Charles Owen
- G. Alan Abel

Philadelphia Orchestra Percussion Sections 1900 – 2006



¹ Ardoin's *The Philadelphia Orchestra* states "Vansciver" whereas Kupferberg's *Those Fabulous Philadelphia's and Wister's Twenty-five Years of the Philadelphia Orchestra* state "Van Sover"

² Bamhart's *Percussionists: A Biographical Dictionary* states 1921-1948, whereas both Kupferberg and Wister state 1923-1948

³ Listed as 1901-1902, 1904-1925 in Ardoin's *The Philadelphia Orchestra*