

Appendix G. Alan Abel



Everything in the picture but the music stand will be played by Alan Abel in a percussion solo on a Little Symphony program Tuesday night. Here his hand moved faster than the camera's eye, and the right hand drumstick is completely lost to sight.

Drummer Will Solo In Symphony Style

If there's any customer of music who has lain awake nights wondering what the snare is in a snare drum, he's going to have the chance of a lifetime to find out. The snare will be laid bare in a "Little Symphony" concert of the Oklahoma City Symphony Tuesday at 8:30 p.m. in the Mirror room of Municipal Auditorium. Conductor Guy Flesser Harrison has planned a program to be played in-the-round, which gives the audience a chance to sit literally in the back rows of the orchestra, and see as well as hear all that goes on.

About the snare drum—it is going to be turned upside down, snare on top, and played—well, not exactly like a guitar, or a zither—but certainly not like a drum either. It's hard to describe; maybe one of those operations that defies description.

Alan Abel is the snare soloist, and also soloist on 12 other pieces of percussion, and the question is settled: how many he can play at once. Actually probably no one will ever know, because his hands are so much quicker than the eye, it's impossible to follow them.

Abel is percussionist of the orchestra and teacher of percussion

at OCU. "Sounds for Woodwinds and Percussion," which will exploit his technique on this concert, introduces at least one new instrument—a beer mug, on which Abel says he does "only a soft roll." Other instruments are one tamtam and two tom-toms, wood-blocks, sandpaper blocks, castanets, chimes, glockenspiel, and six drums. The work was written for Abel by Byron McCulloch, a former trombonist in the Oklahoma City Symphony who is now with the St. Louis. Two clarinets, bassoon and oboe accompany the percussion.

This is not the only novelty, as contemporary piece Benjamin Britten's Serenade for voice, horn and strings will be given a local premiere by tenor Frank Vitale and Harvey Garber, who is back in his chair in the horn section this season after a summer touring Europe with the Israel Philharmonic.

Classics open and close the program; the No. 3 Brandenburg concerto grosso for strings by Bach, and the "Imperial" Symphony of Haydn.

Tickets will be 75 cents, and symphony series subscribers will be admitted on their cards.

The Daily Oklahoman, 13 January 1956.

Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

Percussionist Shows Talents

A receptive audience of perhaps 300 persons cheered the first performance in Oklahoma City of "Sounds for Woodwinds and Percussion" Tuesday night, with Guy Fraser Harrison conducting the Little Symphony orchestra.

Credit for the composition's acclaim is shared by two persons—the composer, 28-year-old Byron McCulloh, and the featured performer, percussionist Alan Abel.

The composition, described by conductor Harrison as "unashamedly modern," contains a wide range of tonal effects, but spotlights Abel, who is an expert musician and a flawless technician.

Displaying a perfect stick control, Abel plays a drum the way it should be played, not beating it, but picking the beats off the drum-head much the same as a violinist plucking the strings.

On this particular number, Abel runs the entire gamut in the percussion section, performing intricate rhythmical patterns on the bass drum, several tom-toms, an inverted snare drum, the xylo-

phone, orchestra bells, Chinese gong—and even a beer mug with which he produces an eerie effect by executing a drum roll on the rim.

This composition was written expressly for Abel, and he is the only percussionist who has ever performed it, and is probably the only one in this part of the country who can.

McCulloh, who formerly played with the Oklahoma City Symphony orchestra and is now bass trombonist with the St. Louis Symphony, wrote the composition while he was a student at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, N. Y.

It's first performance (Tuesday night's was the second) was at McCulloh's senior recital at Eastman. Abel, who was also a student at Eastman, was featured in the first performance.

McCulloh, who has been with the St. Louis orchestra for the past five years, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert McCulloh, 709 NW 7.

Sharing the applause with Abel Tuesday night was the orches-

tra's section which included Catherine Dufford, oboe; Earl Thomas, clarinet; John Huggler, clarinet, and Betty Johnson, bassoon.

The concert-in-the-round also displayed the orchestra's string section and French horn player Harvey Garber and tenor Frank Vitale to good advantage as they performed English composer Benjamin Britten's dissonant "Serenade for Tenor Voice, French Horn and Strings."

In the composition, Britten expresses musically the poems of Cotton, Tennyson, Blake and Keats as viewed in the 20th century. Part of the dissonance grows out of the fact that the composition uses a harmonic structure to coincide with a French horn of the middle-ages which had no valves.

Conductor Harrison opened the program with Bach's "Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 for Strings," which calls for three string choirs and harpsichord.

Franz Josef Hayden's majestic "Symphony in D Major," using the entire orchestra, concluded the concert.—Jim Reid.

Symphony To Swing It

What do you know about a "combo?"

If not much, you'll have a chance to learn. If a great deal, you'll have a chance to air your learning.

And if you think that symphonic and jazz music are as far apart as East and West, and "never the twain shall meet," why there's a quartet of city musicians just waiting to prove how wrong you are!

Two are symphony musicians and two are jazz, and they've formed what they call "The Symphony Combo." They're going to be featured performers on a pops concert where symphonic squares and jazz bounds will meet, as one audience.

This is an Oklahoma City symphony affair, all but the Combo under the baton of Guy Fraser Harrison, and the maestro may swing some symphony music too—he has demonstrated in the past that he can. The place is the Appliance Building, or the Royal Pavilion at the Fairgrounds, the night of November 13.

Combo players are clarinetist Earl Thomas and percussionist Alan Abel, of the symphony; and the brothers Gordon Stephens at piano and Don Stephens on string bass.

As Alan Abel explains the mode of the combo—"It's theme-and-variation playing to the long hair, and a jam session in the circus. One by one each musician leads off with the theme—"takes it," and generally he loses it and "swings it."

ON THE COVER

Alan Abel, 2109 NW 23, drums; Gordon Stephens, 223 NW 7, piano; Earl Thomas, 222 NW 23, clarinet; and Don Stephens, 215 NW 24, bass.

The bass player feels the key and puts in the ground accompaniment, the piano filling in. The drummer acts the rhythmic pattern and embellishes the beat as fit. The other solo instrument may elect to rest, or come in with counter melody. Everything is improvised as they go solo, accompaniment and counterpoint, and every fellow is on his own—he takes liberties with melody, with interpretations, with tempo—but so the beat is kept danceable.

Abel and Thomas believe jazz playing good practice for a symphony musician, if it's jazz in good taste, as much of the modern jazz is, with intellectual quality as well as emotional.

"Good jazz uses more and more devices of symphonic literature, just as contemporary symphonic literature shows increasing use of jazz idiom," says Abel. And as audience is developing for both in both camps—Dave Brubeck, for instance is liked by both.

Abel teaches percussion at Oklahoma University and Oklahoma City University. Earl Thomas, besides being first clarinet of the Symphony is assistant program director of OU Student WYAD, president of the city Chamber Music Society, and author of a treatise on embouchure published recently by the Selmer company. Gordon Stephens is the author of 30 to 40 jazz arrangements in modern idiom.

Tables only, no rows of seats, for the pops concert. Starts at 8 p.m. \$1.50 per person. Tickets at Symphony Box office and Vanev's. Parties may make reservations together; single ticket buyers find table company by choice or by chance.



A combo of symphony and jazz musicians will perform for long hairs and crew cuts (Story on Page 3)

The Daily Oklahoman, 4 November 1956.
 Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

PIZZICATO PROFILES

By ALLEN SOMMERS

ALAN ABEL

The newest member of the Orchestra's percussion section is a round-faced young man who had made his home in Oklahoma City for the past six years.

Abel not only has been featured as soloist a half dozen times in recent years,



but he has the additional title of college professor. While playing with the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra, he was also a faculty member of both Oklahoma City University and Central State College.

In joining the Philadelphia Orchestra for its 60th season,

Abel also joined the staff of the Settlement Music School.

Thirty-year-old Abel is a native of Hobart, Indiana. He attended Eastman School in Rochester, N. Y., and played with the Rochester Philharmonic while a student. After graduation he joined the Air Force and became a member of the band at Sampson Air Force Base in New York. It was after his discharge from the Air Force that he joined the Oklahoma Symphony.

Rated as a highly talented percussionist, Abel was asked in 1954 to make a national tour with the St. Louis Sinfonietta. This past summer he played with the Chautauqua Orchestra.

While the three youngsters of the Abels, Marianne, 6; Alan David, 4, and Paul Robert, slightly over 1, are still only good listeners, Mrs. Abel hopes to feed them on enough good music to further their interest. She is a graduate of the Eastman School where she majored in voice.

Philadelphia Orchestra Program, 11-12-14 December 1959.
 Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

My Father is a MUSICIAN



As told by ALAN DAVID ABEL, AGE 9

MOST BOYS dream of becoming firemen or policemen. Not my father. He always wanted to be a drummer. And today he is. He plays with the famous Philadelphia Orchestra. His name is Alan Daniel Abel. On the orchestra programs he is listed as a percussionist. That's because he plays all percussion instruments. They're the ones that must be hit or tapped to produce sound. My father plays bass drum,

snare drum, kettledrums, the triangle, bells, glöckenspiel, xylophone, cymbals, castanets, and tambourine.

My father was only three when he got his first drum. He began taking lessons when he was six. I was six, too, when Dad started teaching me to play the drum. I want to be a drummer just like my father. So does my younger brother Paul who is now six. We both find drums very interesting.



Eugene Ormandy conducts the Philadelphia Orchestra.

PHOTOS BY ADRIAN SIEGEL

The Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives, November 1965.
 Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

Did you know the drum is the oldest of all instruments? It has been used for many reasons. In some countries it is still used by primitive people as a means of communication. It sets the rhythm for ceremonial tribal dances. It provides the march tempo in parades. And heroes like Sir Winston Churchill and President Kennedy are buried amid muffled drum beats.

We Abels are a musical family. Mom, whose name is Janet, sings in our church and with the Philadelphia Oratorio Choir. My sister Marianne, 12, plays flute in the Ardmore Jr. High orchestra. Paul is in first grade and I'm in the fourth at Penn Wynne School. When I get to fifth grade I'll be permitted to play in our school band.

Besides being a musical family we're also a domestic United Nations. At least that is what my father calls us. Dad is a Hoosier. He played drums in his high-school band back in Hobart, Indiana. My mother is a New Englander. She met my father at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., where they both were students. Dad worked his way through Eastman. During his last two years, he played with the Rochester Philharmonic. Mom and



Family concert—Mother, piano; Dad, wood block; Marianne, flute; Paul, triangle; myself, tambourine.

Dad were married right after their graduation and just before my father went into the Air Force. He's a Korean War vet. Marianne was born in Geneva, New York, while Dad was stationed at Sampson, Air Force Base. After the war my father became principal percussionist with the Oklahoma City Symphony. Paul and I were born in Oklahoma. We don't remember too much about the Sooner State because when I was three and Paul just an infant, we moved to Pennsylvania.

At first we lived in a row house, but between father's pupils (he teaches) and our practicing, well, you can imagine how rough it was on all of our neighbors. Now we live in a nice single two-story house in Penn Wynne, a suburb of Philadelphia.

Paul has just started piano lessons. He likes the drum better. My father is teaching him. Most of the time Paul and I use "drum pads" instead of our drums to practice our rolls and beats. The pads are easier on the ears. All

As "The Spirit of '76," we won a prize in a Fourth of July parade.



The Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives, November 1965.
 Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

beginners use them. Then they advance to the snare drum, bass drum, cymbals and xylophone. When you can play those pretty well you are ready for the big kettledrums.

Kettledrums are called "timpani." My father says the word comes from "tympanum" which means eardrum. Kettledrums are different from other drums. The body looks like a big copper kettle. Unlike other drums, the kettledrum has only one drumhead. And it is the only drum that has pitch. It has hand screws and foot pedals, either of which can be used for tuning.

My father is clever. He helped build his own kettledrums. Some of the parts came from Germany. The head is made of very thin calfskin and has to be stretched just right.

My father says a percussionist has to be a carpenter, plumber, inventor, and jack-of-all-trades. And Dad is just that. He turned our basement into a studio and soundproofed every bit of it himself. That's where he teaches when he's home.

Dad invented a bass-drum stand that allows the drum to resound more freely. This stand which he built is now being used by a number of famous orchestras.

It is very hard these days to buy a mellow-toned triangle so my father made his own. He worked with a metallurgist to get just the right timbre. Then he experimented with the bending until finally he had just the right tonal quality.

I like to watch my father work. So do our two black cats, Jinx and Inky. When he gives a lesson, they like to curl up on the desk Dad made for the studio and listen. Sometimes they listen to Paul and me practice. But just as soon as Mom comes down to practice voice, they scoot upstairs. My mother says they can't stand the competition.

Marianne is like Mom. We menfolk prefer to use our hands. She would rather use her head. Last Christmas Eve we three children put on an entertainment for our grandparents and parents. Marianne arranged the whole program. We sang Christmas carols, Marianne recited some suitable Bible verses, and Paul and I played and sang "The Little Drummer Boy." Dad recorded it and sometimes plays it when we have company.

Unlike most fathers, ours does not have a regular nine-to-five job. Once when a boy asked Paul what our father did Paul said, "Oh, he doesn't work. He just goes to rehearsals and concerts."

Maybe Paul is right. I guess when you really enjoy music, it doesn't seem so much like work.

Dad says musicians are lucky because they have the pleasure of seeing audience enjoyment. We are lucky to



Dad, left, in the percussion section of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

The Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives, November 1965.
 Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.



Harpo Marx was guest conductor at the Academy of Music. I played a drum.

have the chance to see and hear our Dad's work. There are not many children who can do this.

Three years ago, when I was six, I played the toy drum in Haydn's Toy Symphony at the Academy of Music's Anniversary Concert. The guest conductor was Harpo Marx.

Last spring both Paul and I played at one of the Children's Concerts in the Academy. It was fun after we got over being scared.

My father says music is a universal language. People everywhere, rich or poor, can understand and enjoy it. When the Philadelphia Orchestra toured Europe most of the men couldn't speak the language of the various countries. Their music spoke for them.

Dad has made a number of cross-country tours with the orchestra. The tours last about six weeks. That's when our telephone bill soars,

because my father calls us almost every night. We follow him closely on our atlas and learn all about the states and cities in which the orchestra performs.

My father always brings back some souvenirs. Once it was a boxful of stones—minerals from Arizona. Another time when the orchestra played in Salt Lake City, Dad brought us some salt from Great Salt Lake.

Being a musician in a world-famous orchestra gives Dad a chance to meet many important people. When the orchestra played in the Hollywood Bowl, Van Cliburn was soloist. Dad found him a very friendly young man.

One of the soloists at Robin Hood Dell last summer was Jack Benny. Dad says Mr. Benny is very jolly and just as funny offstage as on.

Even though we're a musical family we still have other interests. I'm a Cub

From *The Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives*, November 1965.
Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

Scout and Mom is our Den mother. Paul can't wait until he is old enough to join. Meanwhile he's elected himself our mascot and sits in on all our meetings.

All of us like winter sports—especially sledding and ice-skating. My mother and father would like to go skiing but they just don't have the time. Mother is busy with the house, and taking care of us, and her singing. Dad is busy with the orchestra and his teaching.

The orchestra gives 18 concerts a season at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall in New York, ten more in Baltimore, and five in Washington. Each is carefully planned by the famous director and conductor, Eugene Ormandy. All this besides the home concerts, two evenings and one matinee a week, keeps my father very busy. He has at least three to five rehearsals every week. They last about two and a half hours.

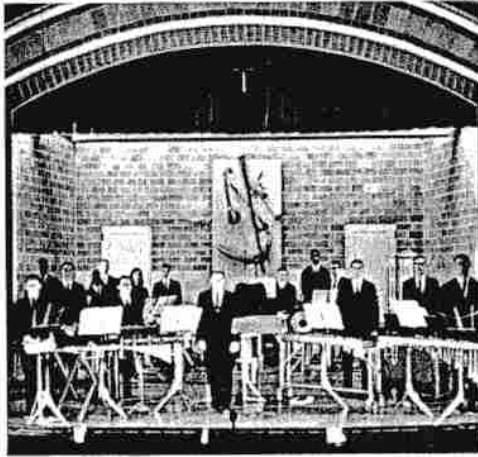
Besides rehearsals, there are also fifteen recording sessions a year. The orchestra plays under the Columbia label. We have lots of those records. The ones we like best are those in which we can hear our Dad plainly. In "Babes in Toyland" you can hear our father playing the snare drum. In the "Sabre Dance" he plays tambourine and cymbals. When you hear the bass drum and triangle in the "Sorcerer's Apprentice"—that's our father.

In between all the concerts and rehearsals, Dad teaches—at Glassboro State College in N.J. and at the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia. My father is very proud of the Settlement School's teen-age percussion ensemble he founded. The group has played at the Philadelphia Orchestra's Children's Concerts and also at Robin Hood Dell. When they play concerts Dad has to hire a truck to transport all the equipment.



Paul and Dad play on drum pads while I play a drum.

From *The Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives*, November 1965.
 Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.



Dad conducts the percussion group he founded at the Settlement Music School, Philadelphia.

That's one reason why we have two cars, a Volkswagen and a Falcon station wagon. Dad uses two sets of instruments. One he keeps at home, the other he leaves at the Academy. When the orchestra goes out of town, the equipment crew takes charge of the moving. But when Dad wants to move his home instruments, he's strictly on his own.

In between all this activity, Mom and Dad find time to play baseball and basketball with us. We love it. Marianne is a better player than most boys.

We won first prize in our local Fourth of July parade as "The Spirit of Seventy-Six." Marianne played the fife, Paul carried the flag, and I played the drum.

Every summer we go to Massachusetts to the place our great-grandmother left us. There we explore the woods and hike and have picnics and everything. It's great fun. Sometimes when Dad is playing a summer concert out of town, we visit him. We did that last year when the orchestra played at the Long Island Festival. The program was not familiar to us, until they came to one piece. We'd taken that recording to Massachusetts with us earlier that summer. So hearing it was like meeting an old friend. Music is like that.

Dad says that when we're older we might form a combo: Marianne on flute; Paul, piano; and me playing the drums. He already has the name—Ready, Willing & Abel. Since we're all "Abel" we can't lose. As for me, I'll always be ready and willing to be a drummer just like my father. ♪



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