FOCUS ON DRUM SET/STUDIO PERCUSSION:
Electronic Percussion
The World Percussion Network -
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A few weeks ago, a student practicing the Basta *Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra* asked me if the work had been recorded. He was having trouble understanding just how the piano and marimba were going to interact. I told him that to my knowledge, there was no published recording of the work. The only possible option was to go to the library and listen to another student perform the Concerto. Perhaps he could also contact a few other colleges to get other recording and interpretations of the work.

But, how about another option? I tell my computer to dial a toll-free num-

Overture? Having a hard time convincing the orchestra's manager to rent a Howitzer from the local National Guard? D'Arcy Grey of the London Symphony in Ontario, Canada was faced with this exact dilemma in February of this year. He spent several hours combining and mixing different samples until he was satisfied with the effect. He then fired his custom-made cannon from a sampler during the performance. If you're ever in a similar situation, who ya gonna' call? The World Percussion Network, that's who! Download D'Arcy's file into your computer and send it to your sampler. Bingo, problem solved!

quencers that have been released or updated in the past two years have this feature.

The second extension of the MIDI specification is called the "Sample Dump Standard". Similar to the SMF, the SDS is a standardized format that can be used to send sample information between different machines. Using the SDS, a sample created on a E-Mu Systems E-MAX can be sent to an Akai S900, an Ensoniq EPS, or any other model and brand of sampler. Again, a few requirements are necessary to make use of this technology. You'll need a sampler and a sample editing program that can save and load data in this special format.

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ber and log on to the "World Percussion Network". Next, I search the database of performances by using key words that might help me find what I'm looking for: in this case—Basta, Concerto, Marimba. In just a few minutes, my computer has downloaded the concerto from the Network. It's then a simple matter to load the file into my sequencer, assign the accompaniment to a piano sound and the solo part to a marimba voice. The last step? Push "record" on my tape deck, "play" on the sequencer, and the student leaves the lesson with a "perfect" computerized performance of the concerto.

Here's another idea. Are you doing a performance of Tchaikovsky's *1812*

Is this really possible? The answer is "YES". A short time ago, the MMA (Midi Manufacturers Association), passed two extensions to the MIDI specification that make all of this a possibility.

First, is the "Standard MIDI File". It's now possible to save your sequencer's data as a SMF, and send it over the phone lines to another computer. The SMF was originally created so that people with different types of computers would be able to share their MIDI data. The only requirement is that your software sequencer must be able to save its data in this format, and be able to open files in the same format. Most se-

If the "World Percussion Network" did exist, it would (of course) have more data available than just the Basta Concerto and a sample of a cannon. Percussionists who belonged to the Network would be free to exchange all types of musical information. How about the Colgrass duets, the flute part to Ingolf Dahl's *Duettino Concertante*, the entire orchestral part to the Milhaud *Concerto for Percussion*, and the list can literally go on forever!

Many teachers and students have already seen the advantages in learning a piece of music along with the accompaniment from the very first rehearsal. In essence, this would provide a "Music Minus One" library for percussionists. The big advantage of using MIDI data, is that it is much more flexible than vinyl or magnetic tape. Tempi can be adjusted to suit the ability of the performer and changed as the soloist increases his or her familiarity with the piece. Each file can be custom-

ized with its own ritards and acceller-andi to better suit the individual tastes of the soloist. These are things you simply can't do with a record or tape.

In addition to sound effects, samples of rare and ethnic instruments could be exchanged. Perhaps you've made a perfect sample of your old Radio King bass drum, or the Bak you bought in Lebanon. By sending it to the "World Percussion Network", others would be able to listen to it and possibly use it for a performance.

In addition to MIDI data and samples, other types of information can be passed from one member to another on the World Percussion Network. An Electronic Mail service could be established that would allow each person to have their own "mailbox". Members of the Network could exchange letters and correspondence with other members.

Along with a "private" mail service, a public bulletin board could be arranged for open access. Announcements of recitals, tours, special performances, clinics, etc. could be posted on this open board for all members to read. Job announcements, graduate assistantships, and other job opportunities could be listed here as a clearing house for the percussion workforce.

Another section of the Network could be set up for problem solving—kind of like a percussionist's "call for help". Need information about finding repair parts for discontinued instruments, or the definition of an obscure German phrase? Looking for someone interested in playing your compositions, typesetting your manuscript, or overhauling your vibraphone? The biggest advantage in dealing with the Network is the instantaneous access to your audience. When you download something to the Network, it's there instantly (a better service than just "overnight").

There are still many problems to solve before the "World Percussion Network" becomes a reality. Think about it for a while. Would you like to be a member? Would you use a service like this? What features and special services would you like to see incorporated into such a Network? The brotherhood of drummers has always been a strong force in the musical world (that's why the PASIC conventions are always such a success). Perhaps the new technology can be used to make this bond even stronger. ■