

The World Percussion Network: Past--Present--Future

By Norm Weinberg

Sometimes a dream can come true.

PAST

In an article for *Percussive Notes* ("The World Percussion Network," August, 1990, p.54), I put forth the initial vision of the World Percussion Network, suggesting a system that would allow percussionists worldwide to share information, exchange messages and even have access to digital files for published music, pre-recorded accompaniments or a host of other applications limited only by the imagination.

Through the hard work and determination of many individuals, the idea of the World Percussion Network moved closer to reality at PASIC '90 in Philadelphia. Blair Helsing (now the WPN Project Manager) volunteered his services to help get the WPN up and running. Shortly after PASIC '90, the Percussive Arts Society established the Electronic Percussion Committee and gave it the task of researching whether the ideas and dreams envisioned for the World Percussion Network were actually possible.

Barry Zimmerman (currently the WPN Co-System Operator) soon volunteered his time and talent for the WPN project. Barry had been experimenting with establishing an arts-oriented Bulletin Board System in Polk County, Florida and had a working knowledge of computers and modems. In addition, he had tested and used a number of different BBS (bulletin board system) software packages. He then established a new BBS on a dedicated phone line and the World Percussion Network went online.

On May 10, 1991, Blair Helsing became the first PAS member to call the WPN and log on to this new system. The World Percussion Network project was up and running. In fewer than three years, over 400 percussionists from around the globe were calling into the World Percussion Network on a regular basis to share ideas, information and friendship.

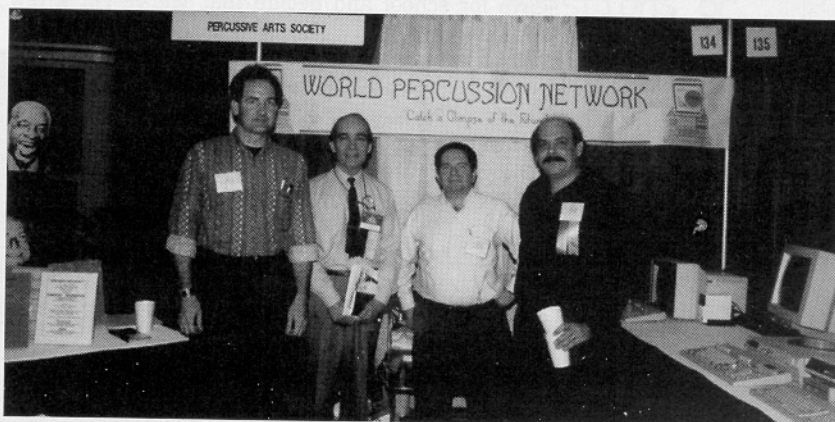
Teachers, students, professionals, novices and enthusiasts use the WPN to stay informed and keep connected to others who share their interests and love for the art of percussion.

PRESENT

During the weekend of April 22, 1994, Barry Zimmerman and I flew to the PAS Headquarters in Lawton, Oklahoma to install the latest version of the World Percussion Network. While the WPN has always been well supported by PAS, the establishment of the system at PAS Headquarters signals a renewed commitment to the ideas and potential of the World Percussion Network. In Lawton, the WPN is certain to be offering more services, more information, and more growth in terms of number of users, value to the PAS membership, and international exposure. The World Percussion Network is now an official member service of the Percussive Arts Society. If you belong to PAS, you can take advantage of the services on the WPN.

While in Lawton, Barry and I met Greg Brownsworth, the new local SYSOP (systems operator). You'll become acquainted with Greg as your

The World
 Percussion
 Network
 can be
 reached at:
 405-353-1441



(Left to right) Blair Helsing, Ian Turnbull, Barry Zimmerman and Norm Weinberg pose at the WPN booth during PASIC '91 in Anaheim, CA. On this day, the WPN was unveiled to the PAS membership.

interest in the WPN grows. Greg is a valuable addition to the WPN Project, and was a great help in setting up the new system.

FUTURE

Nowhere is change so rapid and far-reaching as the new technology. Ten years ago, Apple Macintosh computers didn't exist. Ten years ago, MIDI didn't exist and it was impossible to use your personal computer for music applications such as notation or sequencing.

Many specialists in the field of computers and telecommunications believe that advances in technology are occurring in an exponential rather than linear growth pattern. In other words, advances as far reaching as those in the last ten years will now be achieved in only five years. In addition to the increase in technological advances, prices have been falling while power and performance have been rising. (Just ask me what I paid for my first Macintosh 128K machine!)

It's fun to look at the current state of affairs and try to imagine what technological advances are waiting in

the wings during the next ten years. Let's take a peek into the crystal ball and see what types of advances may be the future.

[Warning: The following scenarios are not yet possible on the WPN.]

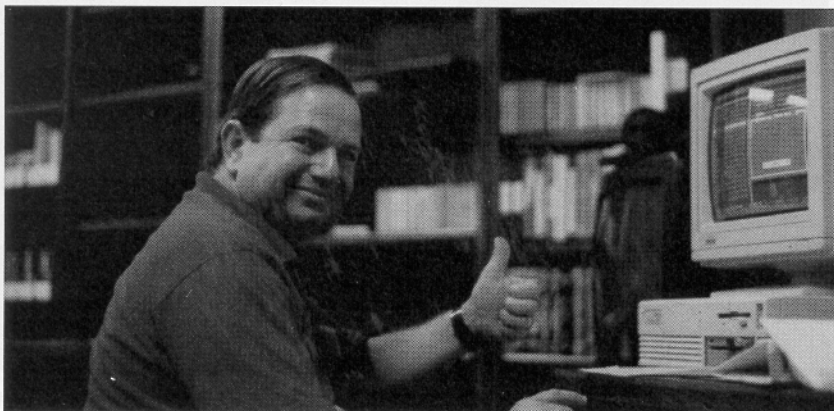
Research—It's 8:15 A.M. You're getting ready to leave for school and decide that you've got a few

minutes to gather some information about Milhaud's *Concerto for Percussion and Small Orchestra*. From your palmtop's internal cellular phone, you call the WPN and perform a search for information relating to the concerto, and general information about Milhaud's life and compositional output. In a few short moments, you have received the full text and graphics from every article of the Percussive Arts Society's past publications that discuss Milhaud or his concerto. In addition to having the full text from all these articles, you have also received a bibliographical citation for all articles or books that have ever been published in any language that refer to these topics. After looking through the citations, you make a request to the Library in Paris, which holds all of Milhaud's archives, to send you a digital copy of personal letters that he wrote that discuss the concerto. A few seconds later, copies of Milhaud's letters are downloaded to your palmtop computer and you head off for school.

Consumer Issues—You've got a gig tomorrow night and your old tambourine just isn't cutting it. You've got to get a new instrument—it's got to sound great—and you've got to have it as soon as possible. Who ya gonna call? The WPN! While making a brief call to the WPN, you request a listing of all tambourine manufacturers and are provided not only with model names and prices, but also digital samples of the instruments so that you can actually hear how each instrument sounds. The WPN is sending your personal communicator (beam me up, Scotty) digital audio files in real-time. The sound quality is as good or better than a CD, so it's easy to compare the sound between the different jingle types, shell materials, and heads while listening to the instruments alone, and in context with a performing ensemble. After deciding which tambourine would sound best for this particular gig, you leave a message for the nice folks at the manufacturer or dealer to send you the instrument by overnight delivery.

Literature—Looking for some music to perform at contest? By calling the World Percussion Network, you make a request to search for all the published percussion ensemble literature that fits your needs. Let's see... class IV difficulty, a quintet, no more than two marimbas, uses drumset, but doesn't require piano. The WPN system then presents you with a listing of works that match your search criteria. When you select a title, the WPN puts the first few pages of the score on your screen and begins playing a digital recording of the work. You can listen to the first minute of the piece to decide if it's what you're looking for. When you make your final selection, the WPN sends your palmtop complete copies of the score

Nowhere is change so rapid and far-reaching as the new technology. It's fun to look at the current state of affairs and try to imagine what technological advances are waiting in the wings during the next ten years.



Barry Zimmerman gives a "thumbs up" in Lawton as he "kills" the old version of the WPN and inaugurates the new system.

and performer's parts that can be printed by any computer system. Your debit card is automatically charged by the publishing company for the cost of the music.

Video Education—Did you miss PASIC five years ago in 1998? Well, now you can receive real-time, full-motion video feeds from the WPN featuring concerts, clinics, and master classes from your favorite percussionists. Simply connect with the WPN and ask to see the video of your choice. The WPN will send the concert into your home anytime day or night—just like pay-per-view movies currently available in better hotels.

Teleconferencing—Don't forget to mark your calendars! May 13, 2002, starting at 2100 hours GMT, the percussion section from the Berlin Philharmonic will be online with the WPN to answer your questions, give helpful hints for auditions,

and discuss their current concert season and recording schedule. Those of you who have videoconferencing installed on your computer system may take part in a master class that will be held at 2300 hours on the same day. So, get your repertoire and your questions ready! Online real-time translators will be available, so if your German is weak, don't sweat it! See you there!

RETURN WITH US NOW TO THE PRESENT...

If you are already a member of the WPN, you're fully aware of its current value and potential for the future. If you haven't connected with the World Percussion Network, there has never been a better time than now. Grow with us, dream with us, and share the vision of a worldwide information interchange for percussionists. This dream is not only possible, we're going to make it happen! **PN**