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# PERCUSSIONIST/COMPOSER DAVE BLACK

Percussionist / composer Dave Black received his Bachelor of Music degree in percussion performance from California State University, Northridge. While at Northridge, he studied with notable teachers and performers such as Louie Bellson, Joel Leach, Ed Shaughnessy, Steve Schaeffer, Jerry Steinholtz and the late Nick Ceroli. He has travelled around the world with a variety of entertainers and shows, performing and recording with such artists as Alan King, Robert Merrill, June Allyson, Anita O'Day, Pete Jolly, Frankie Capp, Gordon Brisker, Kim Richmond, Victor Lewis, Jerry Hey and Steve Huffsteter.

As a widely published and recorded composer and arranger with Alfred Publishing, Barnhouse, CPP / Belwin, TRN, Highland / Eting and Warner Brothers, Mr. Black has written with, and for the bands of Louie Bellson, Sammy Nestico, Bill Watrous, Bobby Shew, Ed Shaughnessy, Gordon Brisker and the C.S.U. Northridge Jazz Ensemble. He has been the recipient of many awards and commissions, including eleven consecutive ASCAP Popular Composer Awards and two Grammy participation / nomination certificates - for his performance contribution on Anita O'Day's Grammy-nominated album *In a Mellow Tone*, and the other for his contribution as album-track composer on Louie Bellson's Grammy-nominated album *Airmail Special*.

Mr. Black is the co-author of several books published by Alfred Publishing Company: *Alfred's Drum Method, Books 1 & 2* (the world's current best seller); *Alfred's Beginning Drumset Method*; *Contemporary Brush Techniques*; *Alfred's Beginning Snare Drum Duets*; *Cymbals: A Crash Course*; *A Jazz Diary*; *Drumset Independence & Syncopation*; and *The Essential Dictionary of Orchestration*. His books and music are used and performed by tens of thousands of young people all over the world. He has also written countless articles, book reviews and concert reviews for prominent magazines such as *Down Beat*, *The Instrumentalist*, *Modern Drummer*, *Modern Percussionist*, *Drums and Drumming*, *Drum Tracks*, *Grammy Pulse*, *Jazz Educators Journal* and *Music Connection* - in addition to having been a featured subject in many of them.

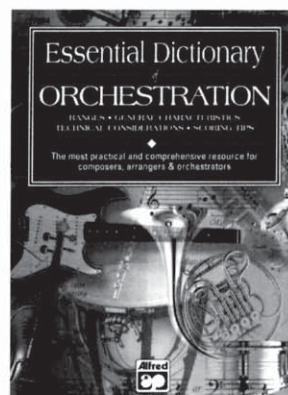
As an active member of the Percussive Arts Society (PAS), Mr. Black is currently a member of the Sustaining Members Advisory Council. He served on the

National Board of Directors for six years and was selected to host / chair the 1991 Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Anaheim, California. He presently serves as the Director of Instrumental Music for Alfred Publishing Company.

During a visit to Sydney earlier this year, Dave Black was interviewed by John Benson and Steve Williams (Performing Arts Unit, NSW Dept. of Education), David Roffe (Australian Academy of Music), and Ian Coss (Alfred Publishing Australia).

**David Roffe:** *Why did you see a need for this particular book? Why did you actually write it?*

**Dave Black:** There were already three other dictionaries in the series: the *Essential Dictionary of Notation* (Gerou / Lusk), the *Essential Songwriter's Rhyming Dictionary* (Mitchell), and the *Essential Dictionary of Music* (Harnsberger). So, we thought a book on orchestration would be the next logical addition to the other three books. As composers ourselves, we felt very frustrated by the fact that in order to get any kind of useful and practical information, you had to search through orchestration / arranging books that were two inches thick. And, you usually had to read through complete paragraphs in order to find basic information on ranges, general characteristics, technical restrictions, etc. Tom Gerou approached me with the idea of writing the book. Once we were able to come up with a workable concept, we



were pretty much into it, but it took a while. We ended up going through two or three re-writes until we were able to come up with what we felt was the most logical way to organise the book.

In the end, I believe the book turned out to be a nice supplemental addition to the many fine arranging books already out on the

market. And, we feel it fills a need not only for those who have formal musical backgrounds, but for those who don't but want to find practical information in order to help them do simple arrangements on their own. So, that's basically how the book got started.

**Ian Coss:** *Could you just, as an introduction to this book, give a little outline as to how each chapter or instrument is formulated, and the reason for the order?*

**Dave Black:** The book is organised alphabetically by instrument groupings and again within each instrument grouping so that instruments can be found quickly. We have divided each instrument section into major focus areas that include: Tonal and Dynamic Qualities, General Characteristics, Technical Considerations, Scoring Tips and, in some cases, Special Effects and Notation Considerations. Bold treatments of text are used to highlight important points for clarity and quick reference. The percussion section has been organised into pitched skins, non-pitched skins, pitched metals and non-pitched metals. Also included in the section on percussion is a fairly lengthy explanation on percussion notation.

**Ian Coss:** *What sources did you actually use?*

**Dave Black:** We used a variety of sources ranging anywhere from Kent Kennan and Rimsky-Korsakov, to Sammy Nestico and Henry Mancini. In addition, we sent the major instrument sections to established instrumentalists for their comments and input.

**Steve Williams:** *As a conductor, I found the information incredibly accessible. For example, I thought the section on bowings for stringed instruments, the explanation of harmonics, the section on percussion notation, etc. were incredibly concise and informative.*

**Dave Black:** Thank you. We tried to include as much information as possible, including a table of harmonics for the major string instruments and, again, a section on percussion notation. With percussion notation, in particular, there are a number of drum publications on the market, and the notation for each book may be slightly different. We wanted to provide the end-user (especially the non-percussionist) with a somewhat standardised way of notating percussion parts.

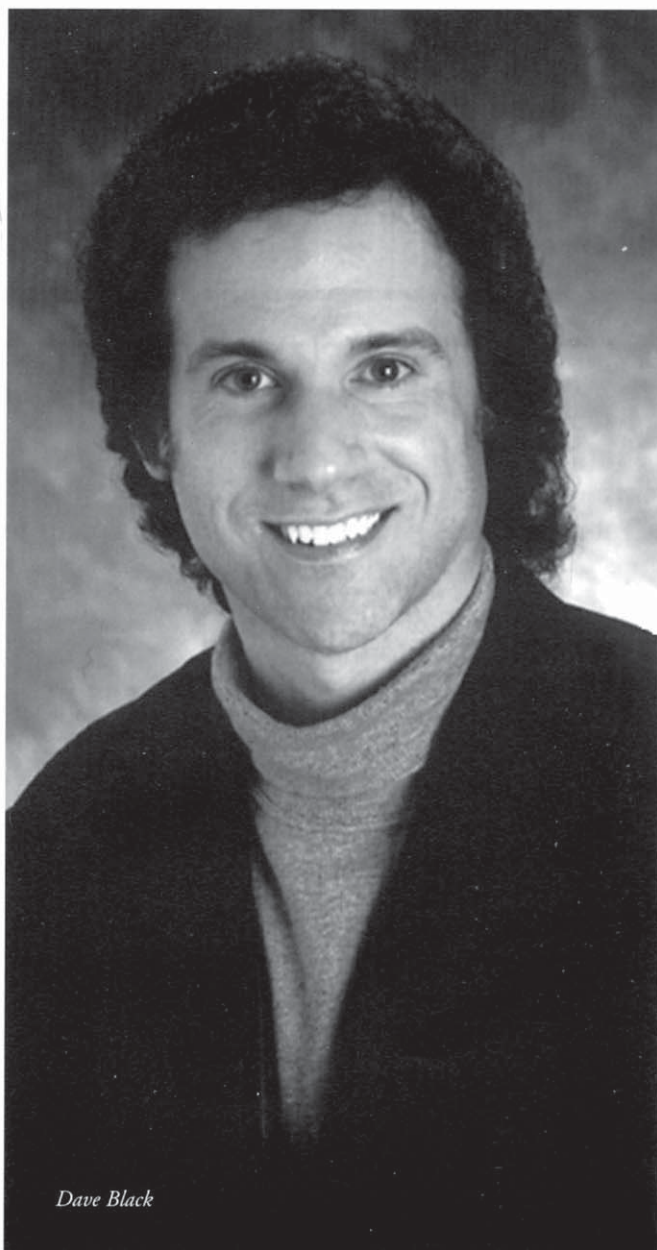
**David Roffe:** *Is anything happening in the States at the moment to standardise percussion parts?*

**Dave Black:** Yes. The Percussive Arts Society just came out with a book called *Guide to Standardised Drumset Notation*. Norm Weinberg wrote the book and I was on the committee that reviewed material for that publication. The book is available through, and published by, PAS (Percussive Arts Society). The purpose of that book is to try and establish an industry standard for notating drumset and / or percussion music.

**Steve Williams:** *I think the beauty of something like this orchestration dictionary is that it's so concise and really does cover an incredibly broad range of things, yet in a very compact way. Did you worry that the more you included, the more the dictionary would grow to the size of a Walter Piston work?*

**Dave Black:** No, not really. We knew what our page limitation was and were very conscious of that during the writing of the book. The idea was not to produce a full-length orchestration book like the Piston or Kennan publications. Those books are already established and are geared toward a different market. The goal of our book, quite frankly, was to avoid competing with those kinds of hardbacks.

*(Interview with Dave Black continued on page 25)*



*Dave Black*

It really does, in terms of the instruments, cover more than most other orchestration books because we used so many different sources. And although we've included over a hundred percussion instruments, there are certainly a number of the more obscure ones we didn't include because of space limitations. The instruments we included, however, are covered in greater detail than most of the other sources we read.

What's really unique about our book, in my opinion, is the way in which it is organised. Again, with the larger books, you really have to hunt for the practical information you're looking for. Because the *Essential Dictionary of Orchestration* is organised by major headings, such as General Characteristics, Ranges, etc., it makes it easy for the end user to be able to skip from section to section in order to find the information they're looking for. In the saxophone section, for example, I wrote a whole section on jazz voicings and section scoring for the jazz band. Because of the uniqueness of that idiom, it was important to provide that kind of detail.

**Ian Coss:** *Tell us about the spiral-bound edition.*

**Dave Black:** Because a composer/arranger will often write at the piano, we thought it would be a good idea to come out with an edition that would allow the book to lie flat on a piano keyboard stand. The spiral-bound edition (or Handy-Guide as we call it) makes it more convenient for the musician to refer to the dictionary when writing at the piano.

**Steve Williams:** *So they're not identical in size, but in content?*

**Dave Black:** The two editions are different in size, but very similar in content. The only things we left out of the spiral-bound edition were some of the various cymbal types in the percussion section. The design and formatting of the handy-guide edition is different, but the information and organisation is basically the same.

**Ian Coss:** *Just looking at the list of endorsements, the book has had some really phenomenal reviews.*

**Dave Black:** Thank you. We've been very lucky. Most of those people, such as Jeremy Lubbock, are highly critical and respected musicians and don't often lend their names to products because they get requests to do that all the time. In order for a personality like Marvin Hamlisch to put their name on the line, they have to

believe pretty strongly in the product. We also received a quote from Samuel Adler, the chairman of the composition department at Juilliard. That endorsement meant a lot to us because he has an orchestration book of his own out on the market. So, we were very surprised and honoured that he endorsed our book.

**John Benson:** *Have you been approached with suggestions for the next edition?*

**Dave Black:** Well, the logical follow-up to this book would be a dictionary more focused on arranging. As you know, the first part of any major orchestration book covers all the instruments. The next part usually deals with the "nuts and bolts" of scoring/orchestrating for the various instruments. In addition, many orchestration books will also include actual examples from well-known works. So, the next logical step for us would be to present that kind of information in a dictionary format.

**John Benson:** *Have you given multimedia a thought? A lot of people now compose on their keyboard midi with the computer. If you had this as well, with another window on the computer, you could juggle between the two?*

**Dave Black:** That's a good idea. We've thought about the possibility of doing a CD-ROM that could include a picture and a sampled sound of each instrument. A lot of people don't know what some of the more obscure percussion or symphonic instruments sound like, so we feel that a CD-ROM might be a great addition to the book.

**Steve Williams:** *Mind you, you risk opening a can of worms in that there would be so much to cover.*

**Dave Black:** That's true.....well, we would have to do what we did with the book. We would have to carefully choose what we felt would be the most important and useful information for inclusion on such a project. Another advantage that a CD-ROM could offer, would be the ability to include examples of what a "good voicing" sounds like versus a "bad one". This would enable the young orchestrator to actually hear why something works or doesn't work, rather than just being told.

**David Roffe:** *How much will your books retail for here?*

**Dave Black:** About \$AUD12.95, and \$AUD20.95 for the Handy Guide version. The orchestration book is also available, along with the other three dictionaries, in a wonderful boxed set called *The Essential Music Reference Library*. The set is really a perfect tool for arrangers, composers, songwriters, students and teachers.