



Bass

Better than a metronome?!

by Paul Ousley

Fix-it devices for musicians these days seem to be as common as snake oil was to turn-of-the-century medicine. Every magazine or journal comes replete with entrepreneurial efforts that claim they will change the life of the purchaser. Many fine computer software packages offer great advantages to the teaching of theory and ear training. Still other people have developed bits of plastic or magic contrivances that claim to cure whatever ails you. Most are created with the needs of musicians in mind. Others were created with the hope that everyone will buy one and never be without. It all makes me wish I had invented rosin.

Enter a cure-all product with a low profile. Don Hermanns of the Oregon Symphony has created a CD/book package that may become the next essential piece of equipment. It is a six CD set called *Accompanied Rudiments Course*. This series of scales, intervals and arpeggios is digitally sampled from a grand piano. It covers all keys (major and minor) and has rock solid rhythm.

It all started for creator Hermanns when he was preparing for auditions. He had been playing various free-lance gigs, subbing with the LA Philharmonic and playing movie sound tracks and was looking for the most efficient way to get a leg up on the competition. It seemed that playing with piano accompaniment was the best answer. But, what pianist would sit still for hours of scales and arpeggios... and at what cost?

The early versions were taped. Soon friends were trying it and saying, "It is too bad you don't have it in E \flat minor."

Hermanns responded. "The more I dabbled in this the more I realized that it would be best if it were a truly comprehensive practice tool. It goes a long way toward establishing a center of pitch, ensemble skills, rhythm, and ear training all applied directly to the instrument."

Players are given a tuning note, and a tempo. Then they are taken through a series of 2 octave exercises starting with whole notes and moving through various rhythms in harmonized scales, intervals (which are presented in unison), and arpeggios.

According to Peter Lloyd, Principal Bass of the Minnesota Orchestra, "It is better than a metronome because it trains for pitch and tone as well as pulse."

The player must listen to and match the pitch(es) given by the piano. This reigns supreme over waiting for the almighty needle or blinking light to affirm one's sense of pitch.

Even more significant is the idea of harmonic context. We string players are all too comfortable bending our scales to meet our own aesthetic desires or technical limitations. After weeks of working on a solo or continuo piece in the practice room, we bring in the piano. Suddenly, those high major thirds and low minor sevenths don't sound true.

On the surface, the description may sound a bit dry. Just as with "unaccom-

panied" practice, there is room here for a great deal of creativity. For example, as the piano plays the accompaniment for thirds, the player can play tenths, or insert the third or seventh in the track containing fifths, etc. Doubling up on stops, octaves or rhythms multiplies the possibilities and the results.

Hermanns has enthusiastic endorsements from some notable names in the bass world: John Green, Hal Robinson, Peter Lloyd and Arland Fast. The latter is a contra bassoon player who used the accompaniments to prepare for auditions. His accuracy of pitch and rhythm landed him in the New York Philharmonic.

Cellists have also found the program useful. Hermanns has been urged to adapt his CDs for violin and viola. Most would like a program that covers a three octave range. This could push the length of the program to 10-12 discs. Hermanns is working on a shorter adaptation.

The *Accompanied Rudiments Course* CD set is available through Lemur Music 800-246-2277 or by contacting Don Hermanns: 800-985-7797, fax 503-977-0931, e-mail Ravil@earthlink.net

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