How I Approached the ANZCA Drum Kit Performance Diploma.

Most drummers like myself come to drum kit through rock, pop, jazz, or other popular music styles, often spending years developing time feel, coordination, and stylistic vocabulary. The instrument is most commonly learned and performed within the world of repetition, groove, feel, and ensemble interaction. As a result, many drum kit players have limited exposure to the art music (classical) tradition.

Drum Kit vs Classical Percussion Traditions

In classical art music, percussion typically appears as separate orchestral instruments, concert snare drum, bass drum, toms, cymbals, and auxiliary percussion, each treated as independent voices. Art music also approaches percussion in very different ways:

1. as standalone solo works,
2. as soundscape-driven compositions,
3. or as cinematic textures designed to create mood, imagery, and atmosphere.

The drum kit by contrast, is rarely used within art music tradition and is often viewed as a popular music instrument rather than a serious solo concert / recital type instrument.

Solo piano or violin recitals are widely recognised. Solo marimba or xylophone performances are less familiar to the general public but are common within classical circles, particularly in competitions. Multi-percussion works such as Xenakis' *Rebounds* are rarer still and can seem unusual to audiences unfamiliar with the art music tradition.

The Drum Kit as a Solo Performance Instrument

Using the drum kit as a completely solo instrument within an art music context is even more uncommon. Historically some classical traditionalists have dismissed drum solos as popular entertainment associated with rock concerts rather than a performance capable of serious musical expression, as drum kit solos were often presented only as featured moments within larger performances, such as Tommy Lee's rotating drum kits or the virtuosic big band solos of Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa.

However, artists such as Terry Bozzio, David Jones, Jojo Mayer, and Marco Minnemann have demonstrated for decades that the drum kit can function as a standalone concert instrument, capable of complexity, nuance, and expressive depth.

Even so, a fully realised classical-style recital centred entirely on drum kit remains rare.

Where ANZCA Fits In

This is where the ANZCA diploma performance expectations and particularly Mark Murphy's *Drum Kit Performance* series help bridge the gap between popular music drumming and the classical art music recital tradition.

ANZCA treats drum kit diploma works as serious solo repertoire rather than etudes or groove studies. Performers are expected to:

- Read dense, detailed notation with a high degree of accuracy,
- Perform with the same seriousness expected of a pianist or violinist,
  and
- Present the drum kit as a concert instrument rather than simply a rhythm section tool.

For many drummers, this level of reading is encountered only in concert band or theatre settings, and even there, some degree of interpretation or improvisation around the written part is often acceptable. These solos somewhat reduce that safety net.

The Hybrid Nature of Mark Murphy's Solos

The works in Mark Murphy's *Drum Kit Performance Volume 9* draw heavily from the language of modern drum set playing:

- Coordinated patterns between bass drum, snare, hi-hat, and ride cymbal,
- Snare rolls and rudimental figures,
- Tom-based fills,
  and
- Bass drum/snare drum interactions.

However, these works contain little to no repetition, which can feel counterintuitive to drummers accustomed to groove-based music. Combined with the expectation of strict reading accuracy typically found in classical recitals, this creates a hybrid performance environment that might initially feel unfamiliar or even confusing for some drum kit practitioners.

A Useful Way to Understand The Material

The simplest way to reconcile this is to view the material as:
A modern instrument placed within a classical art music examination framework.
This perspective clarifies the purpose of the wider syllabus and highlights the unique opportunities it can provide.

What Drummers Gain from This Hybrid Approach

- Experience performing in a solo recital setting, with the performer carrying the full musical responsibility of the recital.
- Exposure to complex notation and the discipline required to perform it accurately.
- Development of refined technique, sound control, and musical independence.
- A deeper understanding of the drum kit as a solo percussion instrument capable of doing more than being used as just a timekeeping tool.

My Approach to the Performance Diploma.

For my diploma presentation, I chose not to present the works as a traditional classical recital. Instead, I framed the performance in a way that feels more natural for drum kit players: an educational clinic. The publicly available video on my website and YouTube shows only the essential performance material, but the full presentation originally included a four minute plus introduction and an additional closing section. These sections set up the solos as demonstration pieces within a hypothetical drum clinic. This gives the pieces context, purpose, and a clear reason to exist. It meant the performance wasn't simply "Here are four solos I learnt". They were based in a structured, educational event supported by the written program that likewise was designed to complement this concept.

I chose this format because, over many years of attending clinics, I've found them to be one of the most effective environments for demonstrating and learning about the instrument. Presenting the works in a clinic setting allowed me to meet the syllabus requirements for solo performance while also giving me space to discuss each piece in detail, explain my interpretive decisions, and show how these solos relate directly to popular music drumming.

The clinic format also helped prevent the solos from being misinterpreted as random rhythmic studies pulled from a textbook, even though they technically were. Instead, I could demonstrate how they function musically, how they connect to real world drum set playing, and how a drummer can approach them as expressive, structured solo works in the art-music tradition if need be.

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