

## Modern Snare Drum Competition moves from Atlanta to Cleveland

by Mike Telin



There are competitions for everything, so why not one for snare drummers? When the Atlanta Symphony's principal percussionist Tom Sherwood took a job with The Cleveland Orchestra, he brought his Modern Snare Drum Competition along with him.

The 2016 edition will get underway with preliminary rounds beginning at 9:00 am on Friday, May 27 in Mixon Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

On Saturday, May 28 beginning at 10:00 am, the competition will move to Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art. The final round is scheduled to begin at 1:30 pm. All sessions are free and open to the public.

“There have been many competitions for other classical percussion instruments, but there was never one for the snare drum,” Tom Sherwood pointed out during an interview. “For most players the snare drum is the gateway into the world of percussion. They start off with just a pair of sticks and learn the basics of striking something, whether it’s on a practice pad or a first snare drum. From there they can expand to a drum set, or a mallet instrument like xylophone, glockenspiel, and vibraphone, but the journey begins with sticks and a snare.”

The first [Modern Snare Drum Competition](#) was held in Atlanta in 2008. “I can’t believe it’s lasted this long,” Sherwood joked. This year’s competition has attracted the most contestants ever — at the time of the interview they were at 39 — a testament to its success.

First, second, and third prizes will be awarded in the competition’s two age groups: Division I, ages 26 years and under, and Division II, ages 19 and under. Each division

will include three rounds during which contestants will play repertoire consisting of a rudimental work, such as drum corps or marching band, a standard classical work, and a contemporary piece. View repertoire requirements [here](#).



“One thing I like about the competition is that it’s become a way to commission new works for the instrument,” Sherwood said. “Over the years I’ve gotten over a dozen new pieces.” This year there are two new works, one by noted jazz drummer and composer Ali Jackson, and the other by Steve Snowden for snare and audio. One of Sherwood’s works is also included on the repertoire list.

“A lot of the repertoire that is out there tends to have been written by percussionists, and I’ve written two pieces myself that I’ve ended up using in the competition. It’s only one drum, but it’s fascinating how much variety you can get out of it. There are so many different places you can play on the drum, and when you add audio or electronics into the mix, there is an endless variety of effects that a composer can produce. And I’ve found that composers are excited about the possibilities and the challenges they’re presented with.”

In addition to Sherwood, this year’s jury will include Marc Damoulakis, Cleveland Orchestra principal percussion, Tom Freer, Cleveland Orchestra section percussion, David Skidmore, Third Coast Percussion executive director and performer, and Charles Settle, Atlanta Symphony acting principal percussion.

“It is a competition, but I hope the players will gain from the experience, learn how to be more engaging, and improve the sound quality by the way they strike the instrument. There’s a lot of nuance that can go into playing the pieces, but it’s not a science, so you just have to do your thing and keep going forward. I hope the competition offers an additional experience for the kids to do that. There’s a number of players who have either won or placed in the competition who have gone on to jobs with orchestras or military bands, and I’d like to think that the competition helped them along the way.”

The Modern Snare Drum Competition also gives Tom Sherwood an opportunity to return to his musical roots. “Marching bands were a huge thing for me and for many kids. It’s a great activity, and it’s very competitive with all of the marching band and drum corps contests. That’s where I got my start in the music world. It wasn’t until later that I was turned on to symphonic literature.”

Sherwood encourages the public to attend any or all of the sessions, although he noted that the final round is always the most interesting. “I’ve found that people who aren’t percussionists still have a great time and they do pick up on how the contestants stack up as performers.”

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