

## Modern Snare Drum Competition: 15 minutes with judge Marc Damoulakis

by Jarrett Hoffman



It's a familiar feeling for musicians: to have mastered a difficult piece, then discover someone a quarter their age playing it twice as well. "It's amazing from year one to now," Marc Damoulakis said in a recent conversation about the Modern Snare Drum Competition. "Stuff that we used to think was hard, these kids are coming in younger and younger and playing with ease. And I honestly don't think it would've happened without this competition."

Damoulakis, who joined The Cleveland Orchestra in 2006 and was appointed principal percussion in 2013, has been a fixture on the competition's judging panel. This 11th edition, to be presented by Pearl

and held at the Cleveland Institute of Music on Saturday and Sunday, May 12 and 13 — open to the public on Sunday — will mark his 10th time judging.

Looking back, he can see the impact the competition has had on the community of drummers. "First of all, it's created new repertoire for the instrument, pushing the envelope of what people's idea of it is," Damoulakis said. "That's been good both for students and for people like me who teach." The percussionist serves on the faculties of CIM and DePaul University. And while percussion involves extensive mechanics and technique, performance and creativity are also emphasized. "That's been a huge plus," Damoulakis said.

He's also enjoyed the community of judges that competition director and TCO percussion colleague Tom Sherwood brings together every year. "A lot of us might not cross paths otherwise," he said. "Tom's always been very thoughtful about having

people from diverse backgrounds on the panel — cross-generational for sure, and also in discipline.”

Joining Sherwood and Damoulakis on this year’s panel will be Ian Antonio, Aiyun Huang, and Charles Settle, bringing resumes chock-full of contemporary chamber music, solo percussion, scientific-musical research, and orchestral playing. “We’ve had people from drum corps, drum set, and marimba backgrounds in the past,” Damoulakis added. “These days, it’s not always easy to get those people in the percussion world together. It’s been a great thing.”



This year, a total of 30 percussionists — 10 in Division I (age 25 and under) and 20 in Division II (19 and under) — will compete for prizes that include instruments, accessories, and up to \$1500 cash. As in years past, each of three rounds will cover rudimental, standard classical, or contemporary repertoire. “That’s the general idea,” Damoulakis said. “Some of the pieces cross over between categories. But in every round we consider a piece to be towards a certain genre, and we try to cover all those things.” Repertoire details can be found below.

After a round has passed, the judges convene. Is it tense? “It’s usually very friendly,” Damoulakis said. “If there ever is disagreement, which there is, it’s professional. Tom is excellent — he makes sure everybody on the committee gets a chance to speak, and that everybody’s opinion is treated equally.”

For the first and second rounds, the voting is simple: pass or not. “It’s added up, and if someone ends up in the middle, we deliberate and re-vote,” Damoulakis said. The third round gets more complicated: each judge places the finalists, with each rank denoting a different number of points, before it’s all added up. “And again, if

somebody's in the middle or there's a tie, we discuss it." In the past, the judges have let some results remain a tie. "We've also awarded 2nd and 3rd but no 1st place."

To close our conversation, I shifted the spotlight from the competition to Damoulakis himself, who shared his early background as a musician growing up in Massachusetts. "I went up through the public schools," he said, "and I picked percussion." He was attracted to the drum set at first. "I've always been an avid jazz listener and a fan of studying drummers. Then I had early success auditioning for the types of competitions you do in public schools — all-district, all-state, all-eastern part of the country."

A big change for Damoulakis was joining a youth orchestra in the 8th grade, the Greater Boston Youth Orchestra. "I saw seniors in high school about to enter into conservatory the following year, and it opened my eyes to a lot of things." Summers at Tanglewood opened his eyes further. "But I kept doing everything through high school — drum set, big band, and jazz band," as well as the youth orchestra's percussion ensemble and some marching band.

The percussionist's thoughts on TCO's centennial? "It's probably been my favorite season so far," he said. "Not just because on paper it's the centennial, but because the programming around it has been fantastic, and we've had a lot of great guest conductors. The last two months, with Nikolaj Znaider, Matthias Pintscher, Michael Tilson Thomas, and Stéphane Denève — all those concerts were great. Then this last week doing Messiaen *Turangalîla* was a real highlight for me. We had eleven percussionists here for that."

As principal, it's Damoulakis' responsibility to invite percussionists when the Orchestra needs them. "A lot are often local," he said. "This past time I brought in the principal percussionist of the Atlanta Symphony, a percussionist from the Minnesota Orchestra, a former percussionist from the Detroit Symphony, someone from New York City, and a couple people from here in Cleveland. The ones from Minnesota and Atlanta have been finalists for our auditions in the past. They have full-time jobs, but luckily for us they were available to come."

## 2018 Modern Snare Drum Competition Repertoire

### **Division I**

#### **First Round**

*Tanz* - Tom Sherwood

*Seven Episodes for Snare and Pedal Bass Drum*: Husky - Polachowski

*Patchwork: Séquence no. 3* - Gabriel Bouchet

## **Second Round**

*Nine Lives* - Anthony Di Bartolo

*Tarol* - Joseph Pereira

## **Final Round**

*Monologue IV: Bilingualism/Bilingüismo* - Martinez

+ One solo of choice

## **Division II**

### **First Round**

*Cooper* - Michael Burritt

*The Benson Dances: I. Discrete in Dance* - Ben Wahlund

*Snare System 1: #3* - Frédéric Macarez

### **Final Round**

*A Snare Growls, And He Flies* (with cuts) - Shin-ichiro Ikebe

+ One solo of choice

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