

The Lost Works of Charley Wilcoxon

By Dan Piccolo

This virtual session will present selected highlights from The Wilcoxon Papers, one of the Special Collections in Bowling Green State University's Music Library. The materials in the collection are drawn from PAS Hall of Famer Charley Wilcoxon's personal archives, and include sketches, manuscripts, original artwork, correspondences with editors, negatives and proofs, and many pages of unpublished music for both pitched and nonpitched percussion instruments. While there are many exciting pieces, the jewel of the collection is a complete set of "swing" variations on "The Downfall of Paris," which I have edited for an upcoming publication by Ludwig Masters.

THE WILCOXON PAPERS

When I first started teaching at BGSU in 2016, I received an email from then-Music Librarian Susannah Cleveland telling me about a collection of materials the library had received in 2008 as a donation from Robert and Jeanette Romaniello. After working out the details with Cleveland and Dr. Roger Schupp, BGSU Professor of Percussion from 1992 to 2015, the Romaniello family ultimately donated three boxes of uncataloged materials from Charley Wilcoxon's personal archives. According to Cleveland, the family had no personal connection to Wilcoxon, but had discovered the boxes in the attic of their house when they moved in. Over the next ten years the collection was sorted and cataloged; some of this was done by Dr. Schupp and his students (most notably Robert Ciesluk), some by staff at the BGSU Music Library (most notably Emily Daus DiLeo and Frances Zengel), and some by me.

When I began reviewing the materials, I was initially preoccupied with my excitement in seeing original manuscripts for some of my favorite snare drum music – pieces I'd been playing

since I was 13 years old! I still enjoy flipping through those pages, but during the quiet months of 2020 and 2021, with concerts being few and far between, I was able to dig deeper. This was when I discovered the manuscripts for a collection of "swing" variations on "The Downfall of Paris," written between 1972 and 1974. While there are many other unpublished materials in the collection, including a wealth of material for keyboard percussion instruments, this was the most cohesive, completed manuscript.

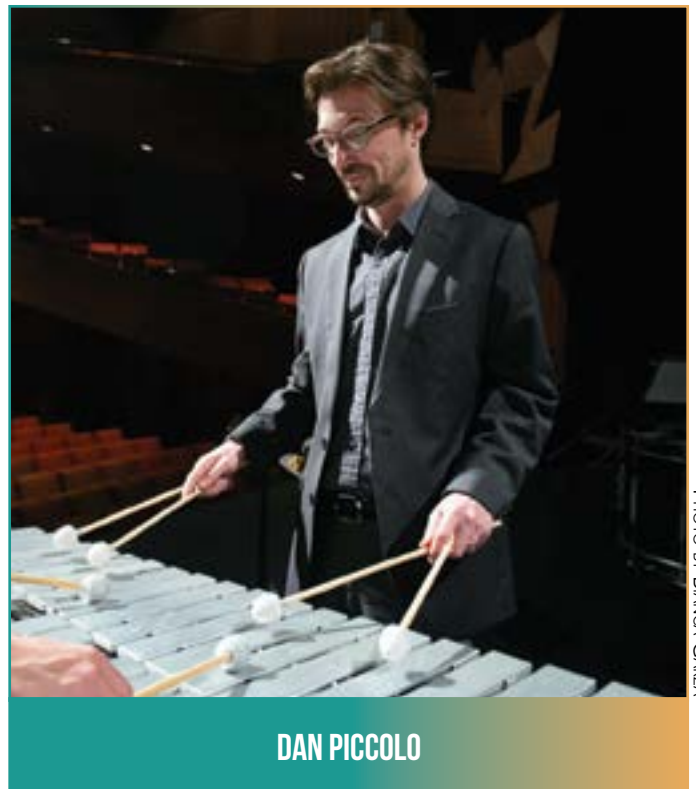


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DAN PICCOLO

THE DOWNFALL OF PARIS “SWING” VARIATIONS

“The Downfall of Paris” is derived from an English tune dating back to the late 1700s, and it became popular among European military bands in the 1800s. It became a standard of the American fife and drum repertoire thanks in part to its inclusion in George B. Bruce and Daniel D. Emmett’s *The Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide* (1862).¹

The snare drum accompaniment to this popular melody has been a standard piece of the rudimental snare drum literature for well over a century. In his introductory remarks in *The Solo Snare Drummer, Vol. 1* (Permus Publications), John S. Pratt describes “The Downfall of Paris” and other pieces taken from Bruce and Emmett’s text as exemplary of “the best of the heritage of drumming in America that dates back to the Revolutionary War days.”²

Wilcoxon had an affinity for traditional rudimental tunes; *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos* contains multiple versions of “Three Camps,” another piece found in *The Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, along with “The New Downfall,” another re-working of “The Downfall of Paris.” What sets these new “swing” variations apart is that their existence has been essentially unknown until now. They come from 30 years later in Wilcoxon’s career than his other popular works, and they perfectly demonstrate Wilcoxon’s ability to employ rudimental vocabulary to make distinct but compelling music with the same source material.

One of the advantages to these pieces is that the theme on which they are based was created as an accompaniment for a melody. This creates exciting opportunities for students and teachers to incorporate a melodic element in their rudimental snare drum studies. The use of melodies is another thing Wilcoxon emphasized in much of his writing; he published a collection called *Drumming! plus a Hummin’ Tune* in 1962 that had students sing melodies while playing, and among the BGSU Library’s collection I also found a set of progressively difficult rudimental accompaniments for “The Yellow Rose of Texas.”



IN CLOSING

I was first introduced to Wilcoxon’s music at age 13 when I began taking private lessons from Steve Curry in Rochester, N.Y. As I’m sure was the case for many readers, Wilcoxon’s compositions were my first experience using the rudiments as actual musical vocabulary, rather than abstract patterns I had to prepare for lessons. One of the joys of working on this project has been connecting with some of Charley’s former students – one, Sperie Karas, described *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos* as “earth shaking” when it was first published! Wilcoxon’s ability to make the rudiments “swing” was singular, intuitive, and addictive, and it helped me understand how they could be used together to make music.

While my career has taken me in many different musical directions, Wilcoxon’s compositions provided me with an essential technical and musical foundation that has been a tremendous asset. As I have become a full-time educator, first working primarily with middle and high school students in private lessons and now teaching at a university, the value of Wilcoxon’s writing has only become more apparent. To this day, there are etudes in *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos* that are rites of passage for nearly every student I teach, from the undergraduate to doctoral levels. I simply can’t imagine teaching double-stroke rolls without “Rolling in Rhythm” or mastery of stroke types without “Swinging Accents!”

I hope you will join me for my virtual PASIC 2024 session. I plan to share more history about “The Downfall of Paris,” additional background on The Wilcoxon Papers along with some highlights of the collection, and a biography of Wilcoxon. I will spend the majority of the time on “The Downfall of Paris ‘Swing’ Variations,” including a summary of the editorial process, pedagogical possibilities, and, of course, performances of these great new additions to Wilcoxon’s remarkable catalog of published works. It is in the spirit of this legacy that I humbly introduce these newly discovered pieces to anyone who hopes to make the rudiments “swing!”

ENDNOTES

1. George B. Bruce and Dan D. Emmett, *The Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide* (New York: Pond & Co., 1862): 44–45.
2. John S. Pratt, William J. Schinstine, and James L. Moore, *The Solo Snare Drummer, Vol. 1* (Columbus, Ohio: Permus, 1985): 2.

Dan Piccolo regularly performs and teaches in a wide range of musical settings. He has recorded and toured internationally as a concert percussionist, jazz drummer, and world percussion specialist. Dr. Piccolo frequently appears as a clinician at universities throughout the United States. He is Associate Professor of Percussion in the College of Musical Arts at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. Visit www.danpiccolo.com for more information. **PN**