

Watering Brings Growth

By Adam Norris and Thomas Claesen

The experience of any battery percussion section throughout a given season is one of fluidity, where parts, stickings, dynamics, and more are constantly in a battle to find the appropriate balance of risk vs. execution. This can be complicated by multiple factors, including the voicing and volumes of the rest of the musical ensemble, the staging and physical demand, and more. In our PASIC50 clinic, we will shed light on the typical considerations we make for the Rhythm X quadline.

One constant (or, at least, near constant) occasion throughout the season is the need to “water” the parts. For those unfamiliar with the battery terminology, this usually refers to simplifying the parts to be more achievable (and therefore clearer for the listener/judge) by diluting the skill sets and/or voices — removing some of the more difficult rudiments embedded in the part itself, simplifying rhythms, or removing some voices altogether. There is an age-old adage in the battery world: The fastest way to clean the snare line is to take out the quads. While humorous (at least to non-quad drummers) and unfortunately very effective at the stated goal, we like to ask: What if there is a better way? The “old” way can achieve the desired result in most cases but usually comes at the cost of students and performers feeling disappointed and demoralized, even if the

action taken is not a direct result of execution issues.

In our opinion, “watering” something should encourage growth. Instead of asking “Should this be removed?” a better question would be “Should this be modified?” With some straightforward tips, a battery section may be able to find the best of both worlds: music that students are still excited about playing, while achieving the appropriate transparency and execution required for the ensemble.

First, an educator needs to accurately diagnose what the root cause of the issue may be, instead of just the symptom. What is the intent and why is it not coming across? For instance, check out the excerpt in Example 1.

In the original version, the balance of the battery ensemble sounds off. Even if the quads nail the rhythms and are visually at the same height, they don’t seem to fit in with what the snares, basses, and cymbals are doing. Gut reaction? Take out the quads. Our suggestion: tweak the voicing and even the rhythms.

These are the diagnoses and fixes we found through multiple iterations:

- The triplet roll from the original version wasn’t quite getting across. The real culprit was changing drums every partial during counts 6–8 of that roll. Sometimes the constant changing of frequencies can simply sound “muddy” when combined



Thomas Claesen



Adam Norris

ORIGINAL VERSION

Andrew Markworth
Tim Jackson

Example 1: ORIGINAL VERSION

Tempo: $\text{♩} = 192$

Drum parts (Measures 1-8):

- Snare:** Measures 1-4 show triplet patterns. Measure 5 starts with a *mf* dynamic, increasing to *ff* by measure 6. Measure 7 continues the *ff* pattern. Measure 8 ends with a *V* (cymbal crash).
- Quads:** Measures 1-4 show triplet patterns. Measure 5 starts with a *p* dynamic, increasing to *ff* by measure 6. Measure 7 continues the *ff* pattern. Measure 8 ends with a *V* (cymbal crash).
- Bass:** Measures 1-4 show triplet patterns. Measure 5 starts with a *p* dynamic, increasing to *ff* by measure 6. Measure 7 continues the *ff* pattern. Measure 8 ends with a *V* (cymbal crash).
- Cymbals:** Measures 1-4 are silent. Measure 5 starts with a *p* dynamic, increasing to *f* by measure 6. Measure 7 continues the *f* pattern. Measure 8 ends with a *V* (cymbal crash).

Measure numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Dynamic markings: *mf*, *ff*, *p*, *f*.

Accents: *>*

Triplet markings: *3*

Other markings: *CC*, *C*, *B*, *L*, *R*, *RL*, *RL RL RL RL*, *B B B*, *B L R L R L R*, *L B*.

with other static voices like the snare drums, even if the rhythms are perfectly aligned. Removing or limiting the lateral motion can do wonders for clearing up the sound while allowing the performers to still participate.

Sidenote: the start of the crescendo comes with a drum change to drum 2

(in the final version). While the snares technically already increased their stick heights there, we kept those two diddles on drum 2 at three inches because the around takes care of that dynamic jump. More on that below.

- The quarter-note triplet in the tenor voice didn't work. It remained in the bass

voice, but we made the upper battery part unison. That contributed to the triplet roll "cutting" more up top instead of distracting from it.

- On the fivelet, we got rid of the big 4-3 jump with the crossover. The challenging lateral motion in combination with the original dynamics just wasn't working

out. Compensating for taking out something challenging like that, we inserted scrapes on the second fivelet. It was appropriate, felt good, and kept some lateral demand.

- Zooming out, we noticed that part of our beef with the original music was a discrepancy in dynamics with the front ensemble. The above changes were part of a coordinated effort to match dynamics

front to back, enhancing the clarity of intent for this entire moment.

Example 2 shows the Final(s) Version.

This approach allows the quads to still play a part of the show they enjoy, continue to refine more skillsets, and contribute rather than distract. It's a win-win for the entire ensemble and can keep spirits high throughout the competitive season. It allows the educator to frame things more in

the vein of “getting the parts right” from a design-oriented perspective and less of a student performance issue (though that still may be the actual root cause).

For bass drums and quads, we encourage you to examine balance issues through the lens of frequency ranges. Here are a couple of our go-to balance tips:

1. The bigger the drums, the louder they are. Volumes/heights across the various

Example 2

FINAL(S) VERSION

The musical score for "FINAL(S) VERSION" is presented across eight measures. The notation includes staves for Ghost, R (Right), L (Left), CC (Cymbal), and Bass Drums. The score features various rhythmic patterns, including triplets and quintuplets, and dynamic markings such as *mf*, *ff*, *p*, and *f*. The Ghost part is marked with "GHOST" and includes triplet markings. The R and L parts include rhythmic notation with "R" and "L" labels. The CC part includes "CC" labels and dynamic markings. The Bass Drum part includes "B" labels and dynamic markings. The score is divided into two systems, with measures 1-4 in the first system and measures 5-8 in the second system.

sized drums are not created equal. The opposite is true as the drums get smaller.

2. Along with #1, to be more specific: if the snares are at the edge, the quads will likely be too loud on anything lower than drum 1. The opposite may also be true; if the snares are playing a louder dynamic, the quad voice may be lost when playing on the higher drums.

3. Match the frequency range with the volume, especially through dynamic changes. Crescendos work well moving from higher to lower drums, decrescendos work well moving from lower to higher drums.

4. Lateral velocity matters; larger lateral motions in the quad voice are extremely difficult to control at lower volumes. Tweaking the “around patterns” in proximity to those motions can be a great way to maximize the ensemble balance while retaining a majority of the original part.

Sometimes, execution is the culprit, and the students cannot consistently perform the written part at a high enough level for success. The common remedy to this is to immediately reduce the original part: take the diddles out, take the flams out, quads play on one drum, etc. For quads specifically, we would caution against the immediate reduction of the lateral responsibility.

Ultimately, the decision on “watering” parts comes down to the educator’s expertise and experience in relation to the season, written part, student ability, etc. Our recommendation: diagnose the issue and use the smallest version of an adjustment first. You may find that the modification of the part (as opposed to complete removal) allows you to retain the intent of the composition while greatly increasing the ceiling for the execution (and keeping your students happy!). If the minimal change nets an immediate increase in the success of the part, it’s likely worth pursuing. If not, consider continuing along the same path with smaller adjustments before scrapping the entire voice or rhythms. Changing parts is a normal process for any battery section, but in our experience this route has proven time and again to be the best of both worlds.

These strategies will be demonstrated live at our upcoming clinic at PASIC50. We will bring the Rhythm X 2025 Quadline on stage and share with you more quad knowledge, from high-level perspective thinking down to the mechanics of how to play the instrument — from basic skillsets to extremely demanding show repertoire. We hope to see you there!

Adam Norris and **Thomas Claesen** have both taught several top-12 drum corps. They’ve been teaching the Rhythm X Quadline together since the 2018 WGI season. **Adam** is a percussion specialist in the Louisville, Kentucky area, working full time as a private educator and arranger. He is the assistant percussion caption manager at The Cavaliers Drum and Bugle Corps and has been instructing the Rhythm X Quadline since 2013. **Thomas** is a drummer, designer, and entrepreneur. Originally from Belgium, he now resides in Nashville, Tenn. He is the cofounder of Teeq, a new, user-friendly way to give online video feedback, and this summer he launched Quadlingual, a brand representing the marching tenor community. [PN](#)

DRUMSET

Ash Soan

Drumset Clinic

Ash Soan’s live experience includes performing at Woodstock ‘94, supporting The Rolling Stones, REM, Bon Jovi, Van Halen, Oasis, and Bryan Adams at Wembley with his band Del Amitri throughout 1994–97, followed by touring and playing with Marianne Faithfull, Sinéad O’Connor, Sheryl Crow, Robbie Williams, James Morrison, Will Young, Squeeze, Lewis Taylor, Hamish Stuart, The Waterboys, Jeff Lorber, Trevor Horn and Seal, Rumer, Terry Reid, Ronnie Wood, Dionne Warwick, and many more. Other experiences include playing the 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony with Mike Oldfield, being the house drummer on the BBC/ITV TV show *The Voice* for seven years, and playing on the *Terminator Genisys*, *Mission Impossible Fall Out*, *Kung Fu Panda 3*, *The Lion King*, and *Boss Baby 2* soundtracks. The main part of Soan’s career has been within the recording industry, and over the past 20 years or so he has performed on 60 Top 10 albums for artists including Cher, Seal, Robbie Williams, Billy Idol, Adele, Enrique Iglesias, Dionne Warwick, Rumer, James Morrison, Cee Lo, Celine Dion, and Ronan Keating. His discography includes 19 Top-10 singles and to date he’s recorded 32 No. 1 albums and 10 No. 1 singles on various pop and rock charts around the world.



Rhythm X Quadline