

# “Histoire Du Soldat”: the Original Setup

By David Valdés

**D**espite “Histoire Du Soldat” being one of the masterpieces of the 20th century and a milestone in the percussion repertoire, it is still surprising how little percussionists know about this work, Stravinsky’s concept, or even the instruments (he owned many drums at the time of writing “Histoire”) and the techniques involved in this pioneering *chef-d’oeuvre* (he described them very precisely in the part).

In 1917 Stravinsky was working together with André Gide in “Antony and Cleopatra,” a project commissioned by Ida Rubinstein, but he abandoned that project after several months. Some of that already written music was “recycled” and re-used in a new work together with Ramuz: “Histoire Du Soldat.”

The manuscript of the score of “Histoire” (the irrelevant debate regarding the *L*’ in the title would give rise to another article), which is also the score used on the premiere night (and, because of that, it contains many valuable and interesting annotations by both the composer and Ernest Ansetmet, the conductor on Sept. 28, 1918), was presented by Stravinsky to Werner Reinhart, a rich philanthropist who funded the composer very generously. This manuscript was kept by Reinhart and was donated to the Rychenberg-Stiftung on Feb. 13, 1949. Since May 10, 1977, it is kept (but still belonging to the Rychenberg-Stiftung) at the Stadtbibliothek Wintertur under the code Dep RS 75.

Dep RS 75 contains loads of useful information clarifying the total mess that the 1924 score and part are (and, therefore, also the subsequent editions based on those very unreliable sources). Sadly, none of the percussionists who have written their own edition of the percussion part (including William Kraft and James Blades, or even Robert Craft, Stravinsky’s assistant during his American years!) have ever seen or even mention studying the crucial Dep RS 75. I was granted permission by the Rychenberg-Stiftung to get a copy of this invaluable source.

Only Morris Arnold Lang went to the trouble, way before the

internet era, to travel to Winterthur (in May 1974) to check this manuscript. He then wrote “A Journey to the Source” on “L’Histoire du Soldat,” which was published in Vol. 12, No. 2, Winter 1975, of the PAS magazine *Percussionist*. In this article he points out very interesting issues and solves them in a definitive way but, decades after, percussionists are still asking the same questions and answering them *wrongly* (they just had to read that article!). Sadly, Lang never published his own edition.

Dep RS 75 is a clean copy (except for the annotations made



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during the rehearsals), the culmination of Stravinsky’s compositional process. We would be nothing short of naïve if we thought that Stravinsky wrote “Histoire” directly as a tidy, almost ready-to-print, work. Of course, many proofs and sketches exist, and as far as I know, no other percussionist has ever dived into them.

The Rychenberg-Stiftung and the Paul Sacher Stiftung keep more than 250 pages of sketches for “Histoire Du Soldat.” I was granted permission from both institutions to check them and to reproduce the relevant ones in my own critical edition of the percussion part.

While studying the sketches (I checked all of them), I came across this wonderful page:

Figure 1. Sketch 1.33. (recto, 23 cm. x 17.9 cm.) Reproduced with permission of the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Igor Stravinsky Collection



The upper part of the page and the center contains a fragment of the “Marche triomphale du Diable,” with some ideas regarding the percussion and a couple of rebarrings. The bottom part includes some ideas for the “Petit Concert.”

It is the drawing on the right-center that made me scream with excitement in the library. (I had to give some explanations to the librarian, but she immediately understood my joyfulness!) Let us zoom in.

Figure 2. Sketch 1.33. (detail) Reproduced with permission of the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Igor Stravinsky Collection

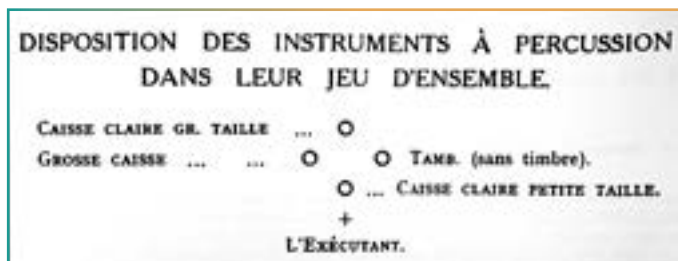


We can clearly see four drums, drawn by Stravinsky’s own hand! They are in a north-south, east-west configuration, exactly as indicated in the 1924 score and part.

To the west we can see a bass drum, to the east the largest snare drum (military drum). Both feature triangles on their shells, but do not get fooled by appearances. Those are not rope-tensioned drums. Those lines are triangles drawn on the shell, exactly like the drums that Stravinsky owned (his eldest son, Théodore, described them precisely in his memoirs). During my PASIC presentation you will be able to see photos and other iconography (by Théodore Stravinsky and Auberjonois, the artist in charge of the stage and costumes) proving that Stravinsky, while sketching “Histoire,” drew his own drums, representing the setup that he wanted for the percussion.

North of the sketch we can see the middle snare drum. South we can find the small one. This drawing matches perfectly the disposition of the drums in the 1924 part and score.

Figure 3. Disposition of the percussion instruments in their set. JWC 43a - JWC44. Public domain in the U.S.A.



The drawing in sketch 1.33 explains everything regarding the percussion part because the drums are set edgewise – that is, the largest surface in a vertical position (*pose de champ* in French). We will also see during my presentation that this disposition is not something Stravinsky draw at random, as other sources (by his eldest son and Auberjonois) perfectly match it. This vertical disposition of the drums is totally intentional and has been confirmed by other sources.

The problem with the 1924 edition is that it took for granted that the drums would be set edgewise. The “aerial” plan-view in Figure 3 shows the drums in that north-south, east-west configuration, but drawing them edgewise would entail the use of perspective (or rectangles, making things more confusing), which is complicated for the engravers. So, the edgewise disposition was taken for granted, as that is how the drums were played before the publication of the 1924 part and score (JWC 44 and JWC43a respectively). Note that there were no performances after the premiere due to the 1918 Influenza. The Suite was played in London in 1920 and a few performances took place in 1923, all of them under the close supervision of Stravinsky. The vertical disposition of the drums was used by the composer himself and by Monsieur Jacobi, the percussionist for the premiere.

Note also that this is not a “simplified drawing,” as no stand would have allowed the drums to be set vertically, so the verti-

cal-on-the-floor disposition of the drums is intentional and was adopted by Stravinsky since the very early stages of the compositional process (so early that this particular set of sketches – those named with “1.X” – still contains music for the abandoned “Anthony and Cleopatra”). This may seem weird, but we have to take into account that “Histoire” was a pioneering work featuring multipercussion. Remember, too, that Stravinsky owned many drums, and that he used them to try the part while writing his masterpiece. Many other drawings and paintings corroborate that the drums were intended to be played on the floor.

Not only the iconography proves that this is the setup that Stravinsky had in mind; his own instructions confirm it. We can find this at the beginning of the “Ragtime”: *All this percussion is (lightly) struck with the triangle beater. The triangle is held by the l.h. of the performer, to his right can be found very close and facing each other the S.D. and the tambourine (both edgeways), to his left the B. Drum.*

Figure 4. Photo by David Valdés.



Note that this setup perfectly matches his own drawing. Note also a key expression: “both edgeways” (*poses de champ* in the original French). This entails putting the drums vertically, and that can only be accomplished by setting them on the floor. Note also how he instructs the performer to put them “facing each other.”

We can also find these instructions in figure 33, again, in the “Ragtime”: *The B.D. is on the left and the two snare drums right in front of the performer and very close to each other [...]*

Note also that the setup in Figure 5 allows playing following these “obscure” instructions: *Play with the sponge-headed stick, which the performer will take care to hold with the head turned down, and to manipulate it only with the fingers (the arm remaining perfectly motionless) so as to provide a mechanical and precise character.*

They are not that obscure once we understand Stravinsky’s original setup.

Figure 5. Photo by David Valdés.



At the beginning of the “Danse du Diable,” Stravinsky indicated the following: *Place these two instruments edgeways [de champ in the original French] very close to each other [...]*

Figure 6. Photo by David Valdés.



These instructions allow one to play in the manner that the composer indicated: [...] *very close to each other so as to be able to easily handle the stick (r.h.) between their membranes in the indicated movement.*

In the “Marche Triomphale du Diable,” the manuscript presents these instructions: *The notes featuring upward stems belong to the right hand; those featuring downward stems to the left hand. The B.D. is to the left and the large S.D. to the right of the performer; before him the other two S.D. can be found, both turning their faces (the drumhead) towards the performer – the small one closer and the medium one further away [...]*

All of these instructions perfectly match the disposition of the drums drawn by Stravinsky himself and printed in the 1924 score and part. Check, again, Figure 5. Surprisingly, the edition by William Kraft includes as a “bonus feature” on page 6, a replica of sketch 1.39, the one featuring the instructions in the para-

graph above, but that has never triggered Kraft's or any other percussionist's curiosity. Everything was there, right before our noses, in the form of Stravinsky's manuscript, sketches, and instructions; also, in Théodore Stravinsky's watercolor, Auberjonois sketches and drawings for the stage and even in photos of early performances, where percussion instruments can be seen on the floor.

Please join me at PASIC 2024 for my presentation "Histoire du Soldat Revisited: The Original Concept," where I will introduce you to never-before-published information regarding this wonderful percussion part.

**David Valdés** studied at The Royal Academy of Music in London, where he gained his Postgraduate Diploma in Performance and his LRAM. He was awarded the Princesdom of Asturias Govern-

ment Scholarship three times, was a finalist at the International Keyboard Percussion Competition sponsored by the Yamaha Foundation of Europe, and was runner-up for the Deutsche Bank Pyramid Awards. David plays regularly with symphony orchestras and early music ensembles in Spain, Portugal, France, Poland, Russia, Germany, and the U.K. He has translated into Spanish *Method of Movement for Marimba* (L.H. Stevens) and [www.percorch.com](http://www.percorch.com). He has published a new critical edition of the percussion part of "Histoire du Soldat" using the original manuscript and sketches as the main sources. David has also published several early 19th-century works for tambourine and fortepiano, together with manuals on historical tambourine techniques. He is the founding member of Les Musiciens Domestiques duo. [PN](#)

## DRUMSET

### **GERGO BORLAI** Drumset Clinic The Magic of Spontaneity

Gergo Borlai is a Los Angeles/Barcelona-based professional drummer, composer, and producer originally from Hungary. Gergo took 3rd place in Modern Drummer's "best all-around drummer" in the 2019 poll behind Vinnie Colaiuta and Steve Smith. In 2020, Gergo was nominated for Grammy Awards in two categories for his solo album *The Missing Song*. Besides being a band member and session/studio musician of world renowned productions and with multi Grammy-awarded musicians, Gergo also became a clinician/educator all over the globe. Some of the artists Gergo has performed and recorded with include Al DiMeola, Nguyen Le, Frank Gambale, Guthrie Govan, Gary Willis, Jimmy Haslip, Scott Kinsey, Jeff Lorber, Scott Henderson, Nathan East, Dean Brown, Vinnie Moore, Jeff Beal, Matthew Garrison, Tom Scott, Bob Mintzer, Hiram Bullock, L. Shankar, Tony McAlpine, Vernon Reid, and Terry Bozzio.

### **JAKE SOMMERS** Drumset Clinic/Performance The In's and Out's Of Touring

Jake Sommers and Mat Maxwell are the rhythm section for country artist Luke Combs. Jake studied his craft in New York with some of the greats, including Dom Famularo and John Favicchia. Jake attended University of the Arts, and Mat attended Labette Community College, where they studied music. They've been doing rhythm section clinics together the last three years. Aside from touring they enjoy educating and session work. They focus on the importance of networking, playing to a click, how to get and keep a gig, and the importance of staying healthy mentally and physically on the road.

### **JAMISON ROSS** Drumset Clinic/Performance "Soulmates": The Drummer's Relationship Between Rhythm and Melody

Jamison Ross is a Grammy-winning R&B/soul artist whose music emanates from the intersection of R&B, gospel, and blues, supported by modern production plus contemporary soul. Jamison's previous projects from Affective Music releases have been influenced by some of history's greatest soul singers, including Marvin Gaye, Rance Allen, and Al Green. Jamison attended Florida State University the University of New Orleans, where he earned a Master of Music degree. In 2012, Jamison won the Thelonius Monk (now Herbie Hancock) International Jazz Competition; that led to his debut album *Jamison* (2015), which earned him his first Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Vocal album. In 2019, Jamison and David S. Hargrett founded Affective Music, a soul-music-focused record label and management company dedicated to defining the sound of soul for this era. Jamison achieved a significant milestone in 2023 by winning a Grammy with Snarky Puppy for Best Contemporary Instrumental Album, *Empire Central*.

### **NIR Z** Drumset Clinic Both Sides of the Glass

This session will focus on how to approach a song and understand the recording technique in a studio setting, while bringing your stylistic influences into the session. The clinic will also present a performance and discussion of Nir's experiences as a session drummer, producer, and engineer.

Nir Zidkyahu also known as Nir Z, is a well-established studio-session drummer. Nir resided in New York City for 18 years and has lived in Nashville for the past 13 years, where he has recorded and performed with such artists as John Mayer, Genesis, Chris Cornell, Billy Squier, Alana Davis, Little Steven, Ray Wilson, Blake Shelton, Dan and Shay, and many others. Nir is also busy in his own personal recording studio producing tracks and playing drums and percussion for musicians all over the world. Nir Z was hired by Toontrack to record the drums samples for their virtual drummer program, Superior Drummer, which includes all the new legacy studios 2.0,[1] New York Studios Vol.2 SDX,[2] and New York Studios Vol.3 SDX.