

American
Musical
Instruments
in The Metropolitan
Museum of Art



Laurence Libin

*AMERICAN
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS*

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
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42. Snare drum, shallow model with metal shell, hoops, and rims secured by bolts. Early 20th century. Diam. 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (89.4.3139)

drums, a good commercial one of nickel-plated brass with a soldered seam has wooden hoops with decal bands representing fancy inlay (Fig. 42). The hoops are secured with metal hooks clamped by ten key-turned bolts (drum rods) in the so-called Prussian manner that replaced less stable cords and buffs. Ten twisted gut snares are stretched or released by a thumbscrew (snare strainer); the snares would have been relaxed to make the drum sound dull and somber when appropriate, as for a funeral march. All other things being equal, a shallow drum like this has a brighter tone than a deeper drum and cuts better through the sound of a full orchestra. Al-

most too thin to hang securely by a marcher's side, this drum would very likely have been placed on a stand. In the 1903–04 C. Bruno & Son catalogue, a very similar sixteen-inch orchestral drum was advertised at fifteen dollars. In that and other contemporary catalogues rope-tensioned and Prussian drums are shown at generally equal prices, but metal shells were more expensive than wood.

John G. Pike made one of the few attributable American drums in the collection (Fig. 43). Inside its shell is Pike's printed label, listing his stock in trade: Premium Drums. Bass Drums! for brass and martial bands—2 to 3 feet Head. SNARE DRUMS,



the double or lined stave drums, Made of Rosewood and Birdseye Maple, also the common maple and Boy's drums, of all sizes, kept constantly on hand. Repairing Done on Short Notice. JOHN G. PIKE, Mitchell Street, Norwich, N. Y.

Pike (b. Plymouth, Chenango County, N.Y., December 23, 1815; d. Norwich, N.Y., July 1, 1884) married Sarah D. Haight of neighboring Smyrna. It was after their fifteen-year-old son's death in 1853 that the couple moved to Norwich, where they subsequently bought and sold several parcels of land. On November 4, 1854, the *Chenango Union* reported the opening in Norwich of the John A. King & Co. piano factory; Pike, a

leading partner, owned the building. The factory did not prosper for long, and by 1867 Pike was pursuing the drum maker's trade. This occupation was not unrelated to another local industry, the making of cylindrical wooden cheese boxes. New York was the nation's leading cheese-producing state after 1851, when Jesse Williams established America's first cheese factory in Rome, Herkimer County, forty-seven miles north of Norwich. Upstate dairies used great quantities of drumlike cheese boxes, and it is probable that more than a few "white coopers" produced drums.

At any rate, the front room of Pike's East Main Street house was furnished as a salesroom, with

43. *Bass drum by John G. Pike. Norwich, N. Y., 1870-80. Diam. 27 1/16 in. (89.4.2523)*

walls full of drums hung from nails. As late as 1883 the Norwich directory listed Pike as a drum maker, though failing health and poor vision had forced him to curtail manufacture some years earlier. A respected Republican and member of the Congregational church, Pike was known throughout town as an able mechanic. The Museum's Pike bass drum measures about twenty-eight inches in diameter, a standard small size convenient for parades. Its mahogany-colored hardwood shell has red hoops, and blue-shaded

gold decoration instead of tacks around the air hole. Pike could have purchased ready-made the calfskin or cheaper sheepskin heads he used, as well as the standard Italian hemp cords, tinned iron hooks, and leather "ears," but the shell and hoops he surely made himself, carefully lapping the joints and reinforcing the laminated, stave-built cylinder with internal ribs at top and bottom. James Robb, drummer of Johnson's Band in Norwich, had a Pike bass drum like this one, which he claimed was the best he ever played.