



## Creative Reuse—Fall 2003

# RePercussion

*by Sarah Weimer, Reuse Assistance Grants Coordinator*

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RePercussion is not your ordinary band—it is a street drumming team in Pasadena that uses found or used objects as instruments. For five years the group has performed shows across the country, including the Los Angeles Fair, NBA half-time shows, corporations, fairs, festivals, and trade shows.

David M. Beach originally formed the group to present the recycling theme to schools in a fun and interesting way, and it was inspired from a show at Universal Studios Hollywood. Beach slightly reformatted the Universal Studios show (most of his performers are drawn from that now-cancelled show) and started RePercussion.

For the past 20 years, Beach has conducted school shows as a variety performer with a self-esteem theme. He was aware that children learn more when the subject is entertaining. He also knew that a recycling-themed drum show would be more entertaining than a spokesperson from a corporation.

Beach describes RePercussion as “guys just beating on trash cans.” While three drummers perform each show, Beach maintains a list of approximately 15 people from which to select. He plans on auditioning a handful more soon.

When asked whether he prefers to use a particular material, he states that everything has a “sonic” quality and selecting an item depends on the sound desired. Beach primarily looks for things that won’t shatter or collapse after being pounded just a few times. Big, thick, plastic containers make a great “bass” sound, and metal can add many notes depending on its size and thickness.

A few of their instruments must occasionally be purchased, such as trash cans and buckets; however, the majority of RePercussion’s sound comes from objects found or purchased from thrift stores. Often, people will donate materials to the group on their own accord. Some of their clients who have previously hired RePercussion have given them permission to peruse their “boneyards” to obtain equipment that is rusting away. Beach will scour anywhere for potential objects and has been known to stop along the highway for odd things on the roadside.

The materials incorporated into RePercussion’s performances do not last long; most objects are pounded to the point of silence after one week-long fair or event. Smaller objects are replaced when needed. A few of RePercussion’s very large containers are durable enough to be used in every show.

While RePercussion advertises primarily by word of mouth, Beach will occasionally spot an opportunity and send a video of a performance to a company or event planner. Most of their jobs come from people who have seen a performance, and Earth Day usually brings in additional contacts and venues. Because Beach was too busy to promote RePercussion, the group was not booked on Earth Day 2003 for the first time. Beach states that he also moved recently, which may have resulted in some organizations losing track of him. He admits that his one

challenge as a performer/producer is that he's not very business-minded, but he is learning.

Each Repercussion performance is unique and improvised, and they can incorporate company logos, themes, and even products. They have "shorthand" for their show so it has the appearance of being rehearsed, but they primarily string together rehearsed segments of shows to create an entire performance. Beach says that if someone were to watch them perform, they would observe each member keeping their eyes on each other as they call out or cue each segment. Each segment has a name or cue, and it's easy to follow the pattern. Each performer has a number, and it's understood for what job or section of the show each member is responsible. He attempts to add new pieces to the performances as often as possible. Because the group may have a whole new group of drummers for any given show, this is sometimes difficult to achieve.

Beach strives to make the show appear as "earthy" as possible. With the exception of the sticks, he doesn't allow any real percussion instruments to be a part of the show. Beach has finally convinced his teams to dress in overalls, as though they were actually garbage men. RePercussion has considered making a CD, but Beach says only a limited amount sounds good recorded. According to Beach, recording three different tracks at separate times and laying them together would be better than recording a live show. He stresses that "smacking trashcans with sticks" is much more appreciated when seen and heard, rather than just heard.

Repercussion's members truly enjoy street performing, as opposed to the odd stage show they are occasionally asked to do. The amount RePercussion charges for a show varies depending on travel distance for the group, the number of shows to be performed, and the venue.

For more information on interesting reuse activities in California, visit: [www.calmax.org](http://www.calmax.org).

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