

Ideas for Musical Percussion Performance

(McCormick)

Teach your students to make artistic choices by asking these questions:

1. What other instruments are playing a part similar to my own? How does this affect my choice of mallets? How do I match their sonority, color, timbre, phrasing, articulation, dynamics, pacing, weight, attack, release, drama and intensity? (Examples)
2. Why should I make this passage staccato or legato? Solo forte or accompaniment forte?
3. What is my primary purpose as a part of this passage? To provide a rhythmic foundation, harmonic, melodic, dramatic, perhaps just a little light seasoning or a tangy spice, or an additional texture.
4. How does the conductor keep students from losing their place? Write cues in parts.
Perhaps the kazoo enters three bars before the solo cymbal crash?
5. To assist in tuning, directors should identify pitches in the score so the student may hear pitches in the ensemble.
6. Listening for balance. How big is the ensemble? How does the room project? Live or dead acoustics? (timpani)
7. Why should I use this instrument? This stick, cymbal, tambourine, triangle?
8. Usually the harder stick gives more articulation. The softer stick gives more warmth to the sound. When do I need what?
9. What is the difference between a warm attack, sharp attack, a musical sound vs. a non-musical sound? Thin sound, round sound, dark sound, light sound? How do I achieve these when playing percussion instruments?
10. When choosing literature for percussion what are my goals of the piece?
 - a. To please the audience
 - b. To educate the audience
 - c. To please the students
 - d. To develop a certain technique
 - e. To develop an understanding of a particular style
 - f. To develop a sense of time or rhythm; timbre/ color piece/12 tone/improvisation
 - g. To develop a sense of form/ understanding of structure
 - h. To introduce an aesthetic? (I.e. new sounds)

Bass Drum/Gran Cassa/Grosse Trommel, Grosse Caisse

Tuning

- as low as possible without sounding flabby
- calf heads are especially nice for low sounds; Fiberskyn 3
- beating head lower than vibrating head. Careful not to set up a pitch
- check for rattles in stand; T-handles; inside lugs etc.

Striking areas

- use your ears for color
- just off center for general playing and a warm full tone
- closer to edge for light color and less articulation (thinner tone)
- center spot is the node; OK for dry canon shot
- notice backbone on head will be thicker

Striking technique

- tight grip will give thin sound
- direct stroke and play off drum (avoids harshness of sound)
- relaxation is always the key to fluid technique
- arm action from shoulder and elbow offers better balance of beater
- grips for two mallet playing. (traditional works well)

Muffling

- use hand and knee to muffle
- concert drum should be resonant. Muffle usually after stroke
- don't use internal muffling. External muffling on occasion only
- valuation of the note in relation to the music

Mallet choices

- Recommended brands: Gauger and Putnam
- Mallet must have right characteristics of weight/mass to achieve the fundamental
- Sustain general purpose
- Legato and staccato for more point to the sound
- leather covered or chamois style
- rubber tubing works well over aluminum or wood for very articulate passages (Bass drum

continued)

Bass Drum stands

- finding one without rattles
- cradle vs. suspension

Other musical considerations

- ideas for phrasing
- valuation of notes
- listening especially to low brass

Important repertoire

- Prokofiev 5th Symphony
- Stravinsky Rite of Spring; Firebird; Petruska
- Verdi Requiem
- Berlioz Requiem
- Ravel Pictures
- Mahler 3rd Symphony
- Tchaikovsky 4th Symphony

Cymbals (Piatti, Becken, Cymbales)

Selection

- French-light wispy- fairly short duration of vibration, when a little spice is needed
- Viennese are fuller sounding and general purpose
- Germanic are for a lot of point and 'klang'. The spice is strong!!
- Timbre can range from dark to bright. Heavy cymbals (also depending on angle of cymbal) may be brighter sounding. Experiment by trying different cymbals to achieve what works best for a particular excerpt. Ask the percussionist to try these cymbals. Conductor: "I need more definition to the sound" or "These are the most dramatic notes and this one is the climax, can you use the bigger cymbals here?" or "I would like a darker sound here. What could we try?" etc.

Basic size: 18" For darker sound K symphonic and K Constantinople
For brighter sound use A Zildjian line. 16", 20" etc.

Basic fundamentals:

- how to get the ears working (listening to your crashes and those of others, recordings etc)
- a relaxed drop technique produces a warm full sound
- angles are needed to avoid air pockets. Cymbals sound 'flam'
- bright sounds and dark sounds related to speed of attack and follow-through
- sound may be darker more parallel to floor
- more perpendicular for higher overtones
- left hand more stationary for repeated fast notes and marches
- softer notes more perpendicular to floor
- louder strokes wider angle and distance
- floor exercise works well when beginning

Suspended cymbals:

- don't use hand cymbals
- lighter cymbals tend to work best- sizes 14-18"
- muffling techniques (mallet, hands, body)
- use cord mallets as opposed to timpani sticks.

Basic cymbal repertoire:

- Tchaikovsky 4th Symphony and Romeo & Juliet
- Rachmaninov 2nd Piano Concerto
- Debussy Le Mer
- Rimsky-Korsakov Scheherazade and Capriccio Espagnol

Triangle

Selection

- nice sizzle of non-pitched overtones
- larger triangles provide easier execution
- various size beaters provide dynamic control
- suspension clip is critical
- not too much play with suspension system
- professional level instruments. (Grover Pro) (triangle cont)

Triangle Technique

- triangle should be hand held at eye level when possible
- strike at an angle usually on lower section
- soft delicate sounds best when played near tip of beater
- louder a little farther back
- usually best to allow the triangle to ring
- one and two beaters when appropriate

Triangle repertoire

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| -Berlioz | Roman Carnival Overture |
| -Brahms | 4 th Symphony |
| -Liszt | Piano Concerto in E Flat |
| -Rimsky-Korsakov | Scheherazade and Capriccio Espagnol |

Tambourine (tambour de basque, tambourin, tamburo basco)

Selection

- Grover Beryllium copper has warm jingle sound & new heads
- dry jingles for staccato
- standard size 10"

Technique

- articulate when nearly horizontal and less so when perpendicular
- cradle for two hand and softer playing
- upside down etc
- between fist and knee
- finger roll and larger size instrument
- thumb roll to knee for accent
- up-down 4 stroke ruffs
- samba wrist strokes
- shake roll with wrist, arm and shoulder
- softer playing use 1 or 2 fingers
- closed fist for aggressive playing

(tambourine cont)

Tambourine Repertoire

Dvorak	Carnival Overture
Berlioz	Roman Carnival Overture
Bizet	Carmen
Tchaikovsky	Nutcracker
Stravinsky	Petrouchka

Other topics to be discussed:

Snare drums, keyboard percussion, timpani

Selection of marimba mallets: graduated approach works best (Yarn)

Selection of timpani mallets: soft mallets for rolls in low pitches

soft mallets for warm full bodied sound any dynamic

harder mallets needed for soft articulate passages (also loud)

Recommended general percussion text:

Percussion for Musicians by Robert McCormick (Warner Bros/Alfred) \$16.95

Teaching Percussion by Gary Cook (Schirmer) \$98.95

Percussion: A Course Study by Tom Siwe (Media Press) \$34.50

Musical percussion performers will only develop if the student is continually exposed to the best literature of all periods, styles from pre Baroque to post Schoenberg, Ligeti, Xenakis etc. if students only play groove music, repetitive chord progressions or the famous ostinato pieces, their sense of creativity is probably going to be limited. Let's make them great listeners as well!!

John Cage: "what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating." From "The Rest is Noise" by Alex Ross, a highly recommended text which teaches us to listen.

Short listed of recommended Percussion Solo and Ensembles:

Snare solo-

Three Dances.....Warren Benson
American Suite.....Guy Gauthreau
Douz Etudes.....J. Delecluse
Variations for Solo Snare.....D. Henslick
Noble and Coley Collections.....ed. By S. Smith
Portraits of a Waltz*R. McCormick

*First prize 2006 Keystone Composition Competition

Timpani solo-

Eight Pieces for Unaccompanied Timpani.....Elliot Carter
Soundings.....Doug Iglesias
Two Pieces for Unaccompanied Timpani.....Robert McCormick
Fanfare Variations for Solo Timpani.....Robert McCormick
Three Dances for Solo Timpani.....Robert McCormick

Marimba or mallet solo-

Concerto in A minor.....Bach/Goldenberg
Unaccompanied Violin Sonatas, Partitas, Cello Suites.....Bach
Japanese Marimba Solos Vol. I,II.....Miki and various
Frogs, Dream of Cherry Blossoms.....Keiko Abe
Concertino for Marimba.....Paul Creston
Soli from Zeltsman Marimba Method.....Nancy Zeltsman

Percussion Ensemble:

Canticle No. 1, Song of Quetzcoatl, Suite.....Lou Harrison
1st Construction (also 3rd, very advanced).....John Cage
Timecraft.....Hilton Jones
Ogoun Badagris, Ku-Ka-Ilimoku,Bonham.....Chris Rouse
Toccatà, Tambuco.....Carlos
Chavez

Upcoming dates:

McCormick's Magic Marimba Festival January 29-30, 2010

Bob McCormick, host

Admission Free and all welcome.

Schools who have accepted for 2010 pending funding approval:

University of Colorado
Portland State University (Oregon)
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Westchester University of Pennsylvania
University of Delaware

Among The Previous schools that have been featured:

Boston Conservatory
University of Miami
University of Maryland
University of Florida
University of Central Florida
William Paterson University of New Jersey
Louisiana State University
Georgia State University
Many Florida High School Groups

The McCormick Marimba Festival was designed to further performance opportunities, study and literature for the marimba and keyboard percussion.