

Percussion Test Kitchen Tips

AMEA In-Service Conference 2013

Josh Gottry / Steve Hemphill

General:

- Start with a good sound picture!
- A quality sound comes from a quality instrument with a quality approach.
- Always try a variety of implements to explore sound options.
- Different instruments and implements typically impact timbre, volume, and articulation, so be sure to consider all sound characteristics when making instrument or implement choices.

Snare Drum:

- Snares should run front to back, not side to side.
- Adjust the height of the drum to the player (concert height stands).
- The best playing spot for medium to loud dynamics is just slightly above/past center.
- As a general rule, for softer dynamics, the stick height should never be higher than the distance from your playing spot to the rim.
- Bead size and shape, stick weight, and stick pitch all effect the sound of the drum.

Bass Drum:

- Player is responsible for both the attack and duration of this instrument.
- Only one head is struck on a concert bass drum.
- The quality of sound varies drastically depending on playing spot. The best playing spot for articulate passages is 1-3" below center. The best playing spot for legato passages or rolls is 3-5" from center. For rolls, mallets should be near but not on opposite sides of the head.
- Head/instrument direction is significant in perceived audience sound.

Tambourine:

- The instrument should be held at a 45-degree angle for clearest articulation.
- Add or subtract fingers to change size of sound. Also may spread fingers to activate more jingles.
- Change articulation with use of flat fist or flat hand.
- Beating spot may be moved toward the edge for more jingle sound or toward the center for more head sound.

Triangle:

- The best sound includes a spectrum of frequencies.
- The triangle clip should make as little contact as possible with the instrument to maximize sustain and sound quality. A second loop should be used (slightly bigger than the first) as a safety net.
- Monofilament (fishing line) should be used for suspension, perhaps 12-20 pound test.
- Virtually all striking motion is accomplished with finger movement.
- Single notes are performed on the bottom side with the beater almost vertical.
- Rolls are most easily performed in the top corner (side to side; no gravity influence)
- Even the slightest change in playing spot or beater angle can change the sound.

Percussion Test Kitchen Tips, continued

Wood Block:

- Minimize contact with the instrument to maximize resonance.
- The open slot on the instrument should face the conductor/audience.
- Poor technique or improper implements can easily result in a cracked instrument.
- Drumsticks are rarely the best choice as an implement (except for plastic blocks).

Crash Cymbals:

- The angle of the cymbals will slightly change the timbre of the sound produced.
- The plates should almost always remain slightly off-set.
- Opposite edges of the cymbals should not make contact simultaneously (except for *pp* dynamics). Rather, a “flam” approach should be used with one edge connecting immediately prior to the opposite edge.
- Gravity is your friend in a quality crash motion – rarely is additional force necessary!
- A little “sizzle” can be a good thing.

Suspended Cymbal:

- Any stand used should maximize free movement of the cymbal, minimize contact on the cymbal, and not produce extraneous noise.
- Articulation clarity increases nearest the bell of the cymbal, but often with dramatic timbral alteration.
- Suspended cymbal rolls are best executed with the mallets at 4-o’clock and 8-o’clock on the extreme edges of the cymbal.
- For louder suspended cymbal crashes, use two mallets or sticks struck on edges of the cymbal. For very loud crashes or rolls, use two suspended cymbals.
- For less articulate crashes with sticks, strike the shoulder of the stick at a 45-degree to the near edge of the cymbal. For more articulate crashes, strike the side edge of the cymbal with the stick parallel to the edge and using as much of the shoulder as possible.

Keyboard Percussion:

- The best playing spot is the slightest bit off center on the bar. For the upper manual notes on larger keyboard instruments, the very near edge may be used as an alternative.
- Adjust the instrument height to the player (adjustable height, blocks, etc.).
- Choose the correct mallet for the instrument:
 - ♦ Bells: plastic or brass (carefully)
 - ♦ Xylophone: poly-ball, medium to hard rubber, hard cord or yarn, plastic (carefully)
 - ♦ Vibraphone: soft to medium-hard cord, soft to medium rubber
 - ♦ Marimba: soft to medium-hard yarn or cord, soft to medium rubber
- The starting and ending point of the stroke should generally be the same (legato stroke).

Sticks, Mallets, and Beaters (School Owned)

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1 General Bass Drum Beater

- Vic Firth/ *Gauger* TG01-General - \$35.75

1 Pair Bass Drum Roll Mallets

- Vic Firth/ *Gauger* #4-Rollers - \$66.95 (sold in pairs)

1 Tam-tam Beater

- Black Swamp GT3-Medium - \$59.00 or
- Homemade with hockey pucks (1, 2, or 3); Epoxy together and drill hole for dowel handle (7/8" or 1"); add friction tape for rounder shape and cover with 4-ply yarn

1 Pair Chime Mallets

- Balter CM2-Medium - \$19.95 (each) or
- Plexiglas hammers from hardware store

3 or 4 Assorted Pairs of Matched Triangle Beaters

- Black Swamp STB set of 3 - \$52.00 w/case,
- Grover Percussion TB set of 4 - \$55.95, or
- Homemade from Drill Rod purchased from hardware store (cut to 9" lengths)

1 Pair Hard Xylophone/Bell Mallets

- Vic Firth M133-medium poly, light - \$24.95,
- Vic Firth M134-medium hard urethane - \$30.95,
- Vic Firth M141-medium hard nylon - \$25.50,
- Mallettech OR39R - \$26.95,
- Mallettech OR48R - \$26.95, or
- Mike Balter 10R - \$23.95

1 Pair Medium-Hard Xylophone Mallets

- Innovative Percussion OS1 (green) - \$25.50,
- Mallettech *Bob Becker* BB34 medium - \$29.95,
- Mike Balter X3 - \$23.95, or
- Mike Balter X4 - \$23.95

1 Pair Medium-Soft Yarn Mallets for Marimba and Suspended Cymbal

- Vic Firth American Custom M1 (soft) - \$27.95,
- Encore 43YB medium soft yarn mallets - \$29.50, or
- Mike Balter Chorale Series 214B (medium soft) - \$24.95

2-3 Pair Assorted Timpani Mallets

- Vic Firth – General T1 and Staccato T3 - \$24.50 each,
- Vic Firth *Tim Genis* Gen5 - \$31.25, Articulate - \$28.95 and Molto Articulate - \$30.75

Sticks and Mallets (Student Owned)

1 Pair Concert Snare Drum Sticks

- Vic Firth *Ted Atkatz* model - \$16.75,
- Vic Firth *Tim Genis* model - \$16.75, or
- Vic Firth SD1 General - \$7.50

1 Pair Drum Set Sticks

- Vic Firth SD4 Combo - \$7.50 or
- Vic Firth *Tony Royster Jr.* model - \$8.75

1 Pair Wire Brushes

- Vic Firth HB Heritage Brush - \$18.50 or
- Vic Firth LB Legacy Brush - \$27.59

1 Pair Medium-Hard Xylophone Mallets

- Innovative Percussion OS1 (green) - \$25.50,
- Malletech *Bob Becker* BB34 medium - \$29.95,
- Mike Balter X3 - \$23.95, or
- Mike Balter X4 - \$23.95

2 Pair Medium Yarn Mallets for Marimba and Suspended Cymbal

- Vic Firth American Custom M3 - \$27.95 per pair,
- Vic Firth M114-*Robert Van Sice* Model - \$34.50 per pair,
- Innovative Percussion IP240 - \$32.25 per pair, or
- Mike Balter Contemporary Series 84B - \$24.95 per pair

2 Pair Medium-Hard or Hard Vibe Mallets

- Vic Firth M25-*Gary Burton* - \$32.25 per pair,
- Innovative Percussion Dave Friedman DF30 - \$38.50 per pair, or
- Mike Balter *Tony Miceli* Mallets 46R - \$32.95 per pair

2 Pair Assorted Timpani Mallets

- Vic Firth – General T1 and Staccato T3 - \$24.50 each or
- Vic Firth *Tim Genis* Gen5 - \$31.25 and Articulate - \$28.95

1 Pair Multi-Purpose Swizzle Sticks

- Vic Firth SD6 - \$17.50

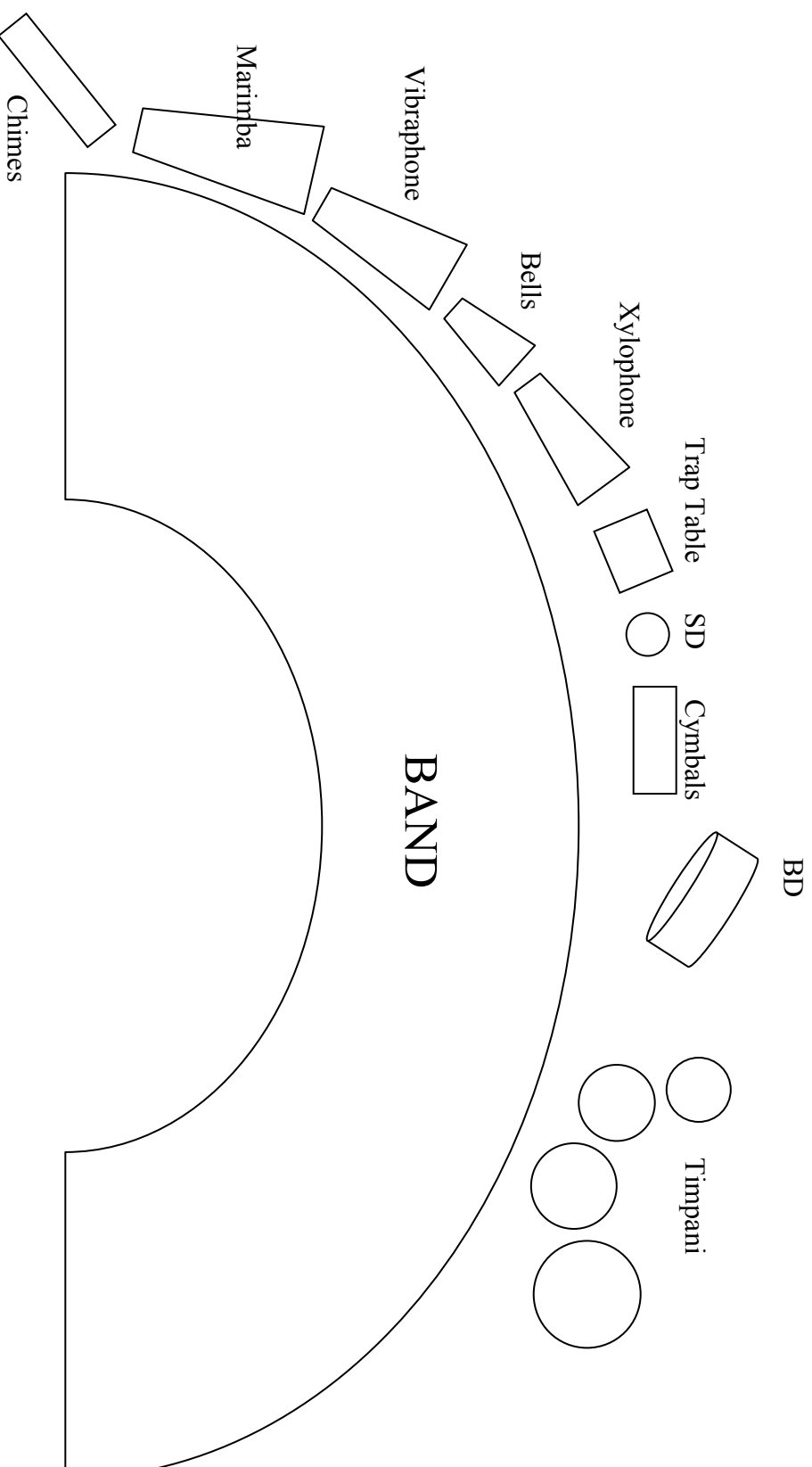
For the younger students, consider Vic Firth Education Packs (developed with a “step-up” approach)

- EP1 – a Vic Firth stick bag equipped with a pair of SD1 snare drum sticks, a pair of M5 medium rubber mallets, and a pair of M14 soft poly mallets for xylophone - \$39.99
- EP2 – a Vic Firth stick bag equipped with a pair of SD1 and SD2 snare drum sticks, a pair of M3 mallets-medium mushroom head, a pair of M6 hard Phenolic ball mallets for xylophone/bells, and a pair of T3 American Custom staccato timpani mallets - \$64.99

TYPICAL PERCUSSION SECTION SET-UP FOR BAND

KEYBOARD PERCUSSION POSITIONING WITH REGARD TO ACOUSTIC PROPERTIES

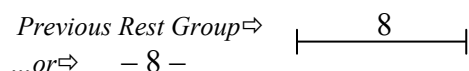
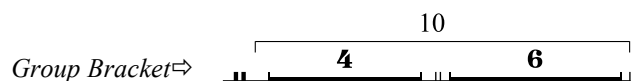
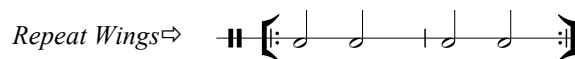
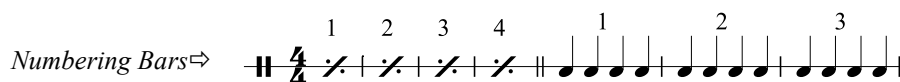
(Note: Bells and Xylophone can be inter-changeable; Marimba and Vibes can be inter-changeable; some keyboard instruments may be placed in a second row behind other keyboard instruments for space consideration; “station” requirements of some band works will require a modified set-up.)



PREPARING PERCUSSION PARTS:

Basic

- Number repeat bars
- Put “wings” on repeats signs
- Use of yellow sticky notes
- Mark stick/mallet changes
- Write in cues... and more cues
- Show rest-groups w/horizontal bracket
- Show previous rest-group at top of new turned page
- Photocopy parts for markup
- Copy instead of carrying music from station-to-station
- Highlight (photocopy only) your part - percussion score
- Pencil only – No pen/ink – on original parts
- Have a good eraser

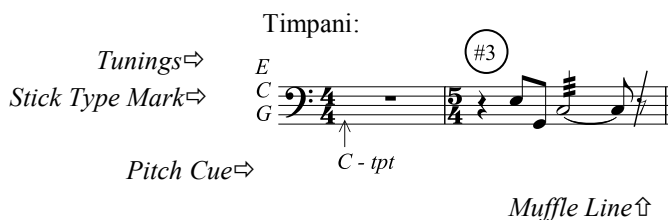
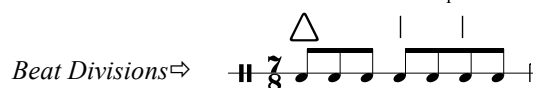
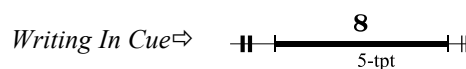


Pre-Preparation

- Cut & paste parts
- Mount on poster board
- Split/cut page for difficult page turns (photocopy only)
- Mark measure numbers for each line & important entries – classical literature (when no rehearsal marks)

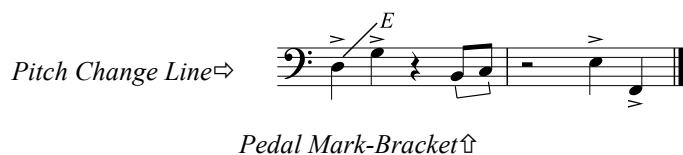
Learn

- Learn abbreviations (tpt/fl/tb/vln/hp/vcl/SD/BD/Δ)
- Learn to tape pages/make parts
- Develop personal shorthand: rit.; in 2; // ; | Δ; →
- Develop system for marking timpani tunings: vertical column, high-to-low; 1-drum pitch change line; if changing later – last pitch to new pitch w/arrow; direct pedaling – use lines or brackets
- Also for timpani: muffling lines (slash on rest); stick choices (# with circle); tuning cues (pitch/instrument) in ensemble



Solution Considerations

- Re-design and print on *Sibelius* (or *Finale*; use computer skills)
- Bind music with plastic or wire binding
- Use music stand extenders or use wide-plate model
- Write a few measures on page top or bottom when needed (easy page turn)
- Make use of sticky arrows (self-adhesive)
- Group and number repeated phrases (typically for contemporary and minimalist music)



General

- For concerts: make list of needs – instruments, sticks/accessories, draw a diagram if necessary
- Maintain a file of copies/portfolio of demanding parts
- Maintain copies/portfolio of ensemble assignments (as Principal Percussionist)
- As Principal Percussionist, develop computer-printout tables for part assignments and instrument lists

The Test Kitchen
Improving Concert Percussion Through Live Comparison
AMEA In-Service Conference 2013
Saturday, February 2, 2013

Starter Questions

What are the characteristics of a quality triangle sound?

What is the best implement for playing wood block?

How can a clear and articulate passage be executed on tambourine?

Does a different stick change the sound of a snare drum?

Is the edge of the keyboard bar a suitable alternative to the center?

Where is the best place to strike a bass drum for a sustained roll?

At what height should an instrument on a stand be positioned?

Are loud and soft cymbal crashes played the same way?

What are quick, easy ways to improve a snare drum sound?

What type of string should I use to make or repair my triangle clip?

What's the sound difference between a plastic, wood, & cracked woodblock?

How do you tune a bass drum and/or make it sound better?

When should a hand held instrument be on a stand?

What difference does cymbal thickness make?

How do I decide whether to change my mallets or change my stroke?

What is the best kind of dampening or muting for the snare drum?

What implements could we construct for ourselves at school?

What techniques can improve touch on keyboard percussion?

How can I help students improve their tambourine rolls?

How can we improve the sound of our suspended cymbals?

Does it matter where the snare drum throw-off is positioned?

"Up" crashes or "Down" crashes?

What are the best ways to control bass drum duration?

What mallets should I use for a smooth suspended cymbal roll sound?

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Clinicians



Josh Gottry earned a BM in Percussion Performance at Northern Arizona University and a MM in Composition at Arizona State University and has successfully established himself as a highly regarded and nationally recognized educator, percussionist, and composer. He currently serves as Professor of Music at South Mountain Community College in Phoenix, where he oversees the music business program and teaches courses in music theory and music humanities. Additionally, he directs the percussion ensemble at Chandler-Gilbert Community College and works with local percussion ensembles and private percussion students at all grade levels as a clinician and within

his private lesson studio. Mr. Gottry's performance record spans over 20 years with experience including professional orchestras, music theater, community and chamber ensembles as well as solo performances and recitals. His first composition, *Irrelevant* for solo marimba, earned him an ASCAP Young Composer Competition grant in 1995 and since that time he has been selected for numerous ASCAP Plus awards and has created a catalog of approximately fifty published works. His works are internationally performed, have been consistently recognized for their creativity, accessibility, and overall quality, and are credited with "intelligent scoring and attention to detail" that highlight "beautiful and calm unpretentious melodies and soundscapes." Josh Gottry is a member of the Percussive Arts Society and the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. He is a clinician for Meinl Percussion, Mike Balter Mallets, Remo Drumheads, Yamaha Percussion, and Vic Firth Drumsticks and currently serves as Chair of the PAS Composition Contest Committee and is a member of the PAS Education Committee. He has been published in several issues of *Percussive Notes* and presented clinics at the Arizona Music Educators Association Conference and the Percussive Arts Society International Convention. More information is available at www.gottrypercussion.com or contact Josh Gottry at josh@gottrypercussion.com.



Steve Hemphill, Professor of Music and Director of Percussion Studies at Northern Arizona University since 1991, earned the BM and MM degrees from the Eastman School of Music and the DM degree from Florida State University, where he was a University Teaching Fellow. Dr. Hemphill has taught at New York State University College at Geneseo, the University of Rochester (NY), the University of Wyoming (Assistant Director of Bands and percussion instructor), and at Florida State University (Visiting Professor). His performance credentials include the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Chamber Orchestra, Atlanta Ballet Orchestra, Rochester Philharmonic, Orquesta Sinfonica Municipal of Caracas, Venezuela, Savannah Symphony, Tallahassee Symphony, Phoenix Symphony, Flagstaff Festival of the Arts Orchestra, Wagner Ring Cycle Orchestra-Arizona Opera, and the

Colorado Philharmonic. Currently, he performs as principal timpanist for the Flagstaff Symphony and as principal percussionist with the "Music in the Mountains" Festival Orchestra in Durango/Purgatory, CO. Hemphill has served as a clinician, adjudicator, or conductor in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. He is a past president of the Arizona chapter of the Percussive Arts Society and is Associate Producer/Director of *The Art of Timpani* instructional video series. He has published articles in *Percussive Notes*, *Percussive News*, *The Instrumentalist*, *The International Association of Jazz Educators Journal*, *Arizona Music News* (AMEA), among others, and has presented at the National Music Educators National Conference (MENC), the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC), the American Orff-Schulwerk Association National Conference (AOSA), MENC Northwest, Arizona PAS, the Mark Yancich Timpani Seminar, and AMEA In-Service Conferences (AZ). Hemphill is a member of the Vic Firth *Education Team* and a *Sabian* endorsee. Some of his percussion music is freely available at a new site – www.stevhemphillpercussion.com – or contact Steve Hemphill at steven.hemphill@nau.edu.