

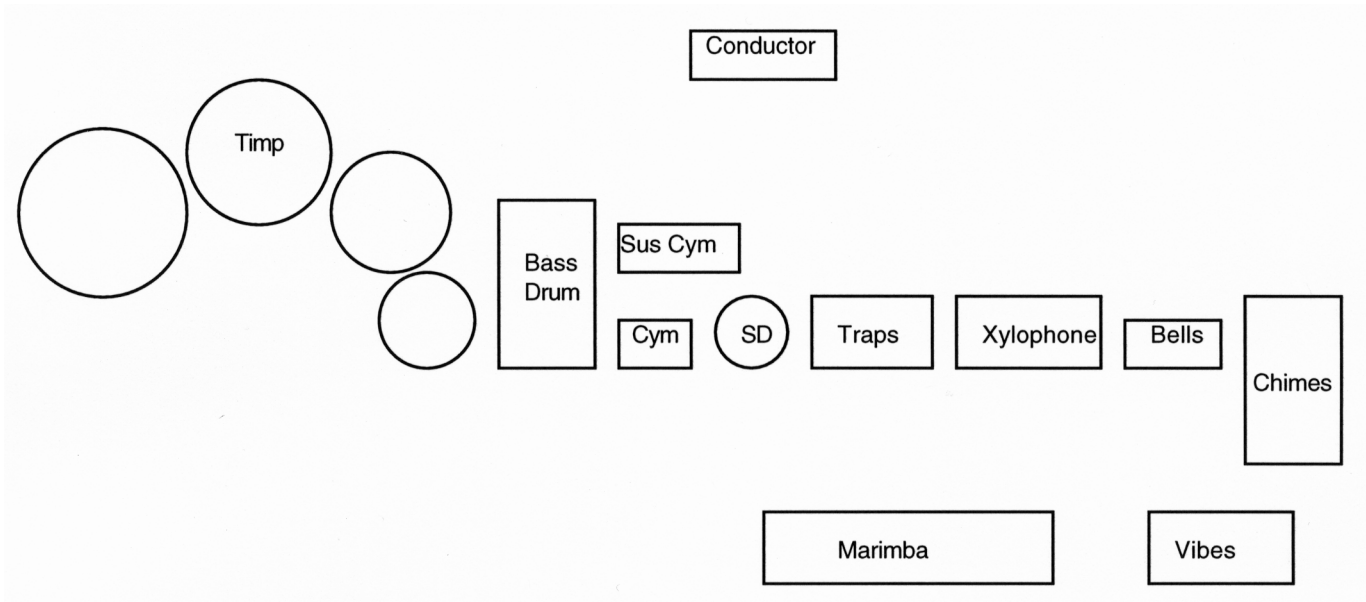
ENSEMBLE TECHNIQUES
and
MUSICIANSHIP
for the
DEVELOPING
PERCUSSIONIST

Clinicians

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The Midwest Clinic
December 20, 2000

Section Organization: The Key to Success



Ideas for good ensemble performance

J.R. Beck

*Be an active listener.

*Be a flexible rhythmic leader.

Everyone in the ensemble is responsible for the "time."

*Snare drums and bass drums have only one fundamental pitch.

Music must be created through accents, dynamics, and phrasing.

*Snare drum should enhance the ensemble rhythm (ie. horns in a march) and outline the melody when appropriate. Agogic accents are important to percussionists as well as wind and string players.

*In a march, the percussion section functions much like a big band drummer, interpreting the parts to "set up" the band with accents and dynamic changes, while supporting the band with a steady pulse.

*Participate in the performance mentally and physically.

LOOK UP FOR CUES!

Rolls in Marches

J.R. Beck

Fast (5 Stroke or Duple Feel)

Snare Drum

R R L R R L R

Moderate (7 Stroke or Triplet Feel)

R L R L R L R L R

Six Stroke (Swing or Backbeat Feel)

L RLLRRL RLLRR L

Five Stroke Roll in triple meter

R R L R R L R

SNARE DRUM: It's not just for rhythms anymore.

by David L. Collier

Do you remember the days when all you played was snare drum and all you played on snare drum were off-beats? Maybe some of you are still there. Nevertheless, much has changed, especially with regard to the expectations for musicianship placed on the snare drum performer. In the foremost ensembles, one must not only have control of rhythm, but must have a good quality of sound; have control of the primary rudiments and dynamics; and be able to play with expression and phrasing. Let's look at each of these aspects.

The Rhythms

First there is rhythm. Obviously any time you play snare drum (or any musical instrument) you must have a command of the various rhythmic patterns you will play. This may seem daunting until you come to realize that there are only 7 Basic Rhythmic Patterns that you need to know. If you master these patterns in their various "personas" and numerous tempos, then you can have excellent rhythm.

The Basic Rhythmic Patterns are:

- ... All equal values
- ... long and 2 shorts
- ... shorts and 1 long
- ... short, 1 long, 1 short
- ... 1 dotted long and 1 short
- ... short and 1 dotted long
- ... triplets

The Snare Drum

Next one must always play with a good quality of sound. This comes from not only good technique, but a snare drum that is in good condition and well tuned. Here are some aspects to check.

- 1) Inspect the drum and the condition of the heads. If the heads are worn or dented, replace them. If the snares are bent or broken, replace them. If the snare cord or strap is worn, frayed or cracked, replace it.
- 2) When replacing the batter head, consider choices such as the Evans Genera Batter head or the Remo Renaissance batter head. Each of these will have a warm and articulate sound.
- 3) Avoid using permanently attached or internal muffling on the snare drum. Every drum was created to "sing" and have tone. The performer needs to be able to control this individually based on the piece and the acoustics of the hall. I prefer to use an external, non-attached type of device for muffling.

4) If you need to replace the snares, consider snare systems by Grover, Freer and Patterson. These systems incorporate cable alone or in combination with coiled wire that produces a much crisper, articulate sound.

5) Select and tune the drum for the style of music. In most concert situations, I prefer a drum that is moderately high in pitch with a crisp, dry snare sound that is responsive at all dynamics. I tune with this concept in mind: the batter head will determine the pitch of the sound and the snare head will determine the responsiveness of the snare sound. However, I would use a different type of tuning for a pop/commercial arrangement compared with Sousa march or a Ravel orchestral work.

The Rudiments and Dynamics

Now that we have good rhythm and a great sounding instrument, our ability to execute the basic rudiments becomes our focus. I consider the basic rudiments to be:

- ... multiple bounce rolls
- ... rudimental double stroke rolls
- ... flams
- ... drags

A percussionist must be able to execute these rudiments in any and all combinations, at various tempos and in any meter. There is a large selection of texts that deal with these fundamentals and you should pick one or two up to work out of.

Also, a percussionist must develop a dynamic playing range that extends from ppp to fff. This can be accomplished by practicing some of the 7 Basic Rhythms at specific dynamic levels. Here is how I interpret these dynamics:

- ... ppp = 1 inch from rim, 1 inches of height, just above inaudible
- ... pp = 1 inch from rim, 1-2 inches of height
- ... p = 1 inch from rim, 2-3 inches of height
- ... mp = midway from center & edge, 3 inches of height
- ... mf = center of head, 4-6 inches of height
- ... f = center of head, 6-8 inches of height
- ... ff = center of head, 8-10 inches of height
- ... fff = center of head, 10-12 inches of height

Imagine that these are colors and I have given you a box of 8 Crayola crayons. Work for control and consistency. Spending a portion of every practice developing one's control of these basic rudiments and dynamics is invaluable to the musical snare drummer.

The Phrasing and Expression

Last but definitely not the least is developing ones ability to phrase and express musical thoughts and emotional ideas on the snare drum. What? You thought the snare drum only provided the intricate rhythms under the beautiful melodies. Oh contraire! Phrasing on the snare drum can be exquisite in the hands of a master.

Here one needs to examine the music and look for rhythmic phrases. Listen for the melodic line and notice how the rest of the ensemble will “inflect” their various passages. Just as in language we have different punctuations like commas, periods, question marks and exclamation marks. These “linguistic concepts” can be expressed in a phrase on the snare drum.

A good method of developing this can be done by singing rhythmic lines and inflecting them with your voice. Use different tones, timbres and pitch levels. Then, imitate what you sang on the drum. When you have developed this ability, then it will be as if you now have a box of 64 crayons instead of just 8.

One can be very musical on a snare drum if you begin to think musically, keep your ears open and listen, and develop the control of the fundamentals. Good luck and have fun!

The Bass Drum Goes BOOM!

by Mark Ford

It wasn't so long ago that using “mufflers” to dampen a drum's natural resonance was in style. In fact, you didn't need a fancy felt muffler bought at a music store, just a roll of masking tape would suffice. Just add a strip or two of felt from a fabric store and you were in business! Creating great designs on the drum heads with masking tape and felt was half of the fun! If you can recall this era, you might also remember that many drum set tom-toms had only one head (taped and muted). Most players took off the bottom head for that flat attack sound with little or no resonance. This type of approach to tuning drums was definitely in vogue during the 1970's, but things have changed, for the better I might add. Drums are meant to go BOOM! Not MFFTTT! (Can you hear that in your head?).

The Concert Bass Drum

Let's discuss the concert bass drum, probably the best example of the infamous BOOM. The student performer needs to be able to control the ring (or boom) of the concert bass drum. A bass drum should not have a muffling device attached to the rim or (heaven forbid) masking tape on the head. Nothing should be placed inside the drum for muffling purposes either. There have been times I have visited high school band rooms only to find the bass drum stuffed with newspaper (and a few other odds and ends that will fit through the air hole...) for muffling!! Here are a few checkpoints for your bass drum:

1. Inspect the drum and the condition of the heads. If the heads are old, replace them with new ones. If some type of muffling is present, remove it.
2. In choosing new heads for your bass drum, consider the Remo Fiberskyn-3 heads. These heads are great for school bass drums. They are thicker and help to give a nice low fundamental to the bass drum sound.

Some professional orchestras keep a calf skin head on the beating side of the bass drum and a Fiberskyn-3 head on the resonating side. Calfskin heads are expensive and more difficult to maintain. Remo's Fiberskyn-3 heads are moderately priced and will hold up under school band/orchestra situations. Be sure to wipe the inside of the shell clean when you change the heads.

3. Some players prefer that the resonating head be slightly higher or lower than the head that is played. Experiment with your tuning to find a full rich sound. I suggest that the resonating head be slightly lower in pitch. In the first week or so, these new heads will gradually loosen, especially the head that is played. So check the pitch occasionally and make tuning adjustments when necessary.

4. Inspect your concert bass drum mallets. If the felt is old and worn, replace the mallets. Students should have three choices in bass drum mallets: soft, hard, and a matched pair for bass drum rolls. Companies such as Innovative Percussion, and Vic Firth make excellent concert bass drum mallets. Keep these mallets in a case or drawer for protection.

The Bass Drum Stand

Now that you've gotten your drum tuned. Listen for any extraneous sounds coming from the stand when you play the drum. These rattles and squeaks can usually be eliminated once you know their origins! The best type of stand for ease of playing and a minimum of extraneous noise is a suspended bass drum stand. These stands allow for maximum BOOM since the drum is suspended freely from rubber straps. Many percussion companies offer suspended bass drum stands at a variety of prices. If you are pricing these stands, consider the Pearl, Yamaha and Pyle Percussion stands. Remember, concert bass drums will usually fit on any suspended stand of corresponding size.

Controlling the BOOM

OK, now your bass drum has a nice long boom, what do your students do with it? Let's first define the playing position:

1. Approach the drum from the shell side with a bass drum mallet in your right hand.
2. Put the head of the mallet on the bass drum head about four inches from the center.

This playing spot will probably give you the fullest ring with the lowest fundamental sound. Experiment on your drum with playing spots. The center of the drum will give a "punchy" less-resonant sound while playing spots closer to the rim will offer a thinner boom with higher overtones.

3. The left hand will be used for dampening the played head and occasionally dampening the resonating head. If a piece of music requires two mallets, the left hand will join the right hand on the batter head. Do not play a concert bass drum like a marching bass drum (playing on both heads).

4. Place the right foot on the leg of the bass drum stand or on a chair or stool. This should place the right knee near the beater head. The right knee should be able to dampen the BOOM by pressing into the beater head when necessary.

5. Place the music stand directly between the player and the conductor.

Listen!!

Now that your student is in the proper playing position, it's time to play the music. Unfortunately, most percussion music is vague when it comes to the bass drum. Composers usually indicate dynamics and when to play. However, they don't consider how long the bass drum should ring. For example, the bass drum part might have quarter notes on beats one and three of a 4/4 measure while the low brass is playing half notes. These sounds are meant to blend yet the composer has written two different types of duration. Here are a few things to consider when playing bass drum.

1. Listen to the ensemble. Which instruments play at the same time as the bass drum? How do they articulate the music? Imitate this articulation on the bass drum by dampening with your left hand.

2. How does the bass drum match the balance and blend of the above instruments? Should it be the loudest, softest, or somewhere in-between the other instruments? Make adjustments while you play to adjust the blend and balance.

3. Does the music indicate a deeper sound from the bass drum or a thinner sound? Discuss this with the conductor. Experiment with different playing spots to know all of your options.

4. Does the bass drum mallet(s) fit the style of the music? Switch to a different mallet if necessary.

The bass drum can be an expressive musical instrument if you keep your ears open to the musical possibilities. Listen and watch professional percussionists play the bass drum for more ideas!

Consistency with Crash Cymbals

by John R. Beck

Cymbal technique is often a neglected topic in the course of study for young percussionists. Due to time limitations and an overwhelming amount of information that is necessary to learn on snare drum, keyboards, and timpani, the topic is rarely addressed in lessons. The student is left to learn cymbal technique during the band or orchestra rehearsal, when time is limited and larger ensemble issues need to be addressed by the director. This simple set of exercises will help start the young percussionist on the road to consistent, controlled cymbal crashes.

The first concept a student must understand is that cymbals will sound best when allowed to crash or move by themselves. The player supplies only the energy for the plates to make contact. If the performer tries to manipulate or push the cymbals together beyond this initial contact, air pockets, crunching, or thin glancing crashes will result. The following exercise will help teach students the correct “feel” for the crash and instill the confidence to allow the cymbals react with each other.

Exercise 1 The long quarter note or “the buzz”

- 1) Pinch the straps on the outside (without pads) using the thumb and index finger next to the bell. Touch the cymbal with as little of your hand as possible to maintain control. Some knuckle contact is necessary.
- 2) Hold the left hand (or bottom hand) cymbal at a 30-45 degree angle resting your elbow on your hip. Rest the elbow here only for this exercise to reduce fatigue as you practice.
- 3) With the top cymbal offset slightly, (top edge one inch below the edge of the bottom) gently set or drop the top cymbal on the bottom and allow the plates to vibrate or “sizzle” as long as possible. Imitate the sound of bacon in a frying pan. Only play p-mp in volume.
- 4) Reduce the length of the “sizzle” gradually until you can play a full quarter note followed by a quarter rest at mm. 60. Drop-Lift. Drop-Lift etc. Try for long sizzles imitating water drops on the frying pan. This is similar to practicing one handed buzz strokes on snare drum.

Develop a “feel” for how the cymbals react to one another. Supply only the energy for contact and get out of the way.

Whether crashing with the top or bottom edge first, the physics of a good cymbal crash are the same. The player initiates the movement of the cymbals and allows the plates to react freely with each other after the initial impact. Any forced glancing, pushing or pulling motion after contact will not give the air between the cymbals time to escape resulting in air pockets or thin sounding crashes. Think of dropping the cymbals together, not pushing or slamming them together. It is important to remember to get as much metal vibrating as possible by allowing all the edges to come in contact with each other.

Exercise 2 The Crash

Set the cymbals in loud crash position with top (or bottom) edge at a 30-45 degree angle. The cymbal plates must not be concentric (parallel) but offset slightly. The upper cymbal should overlap the bottom by a few inches. The upper edges will be closer in a top first crash or the lower edges closer in a bottom first crash. Provide the energy for the plates to make contact. When you feel the cymbals begin to “sizzle” and push each other around, draw them apart as you follow through the motion of the crash. One analogy is to think of opening a new jar of pickles with a sticking lid. Supply the energy to move the lid and relax as soon as you feel the lid pop free. Practice this at many dynamic levels and with varying amounts of energy. Listen to, and feel the cymbals move together.

Depending on the instruments you are holding, it may be necessary to allow the cymbal edges to touch for a longer or shorter amount of time to achieve a full bodied crash. The first exercise will give students a basis for developing this “feel” for the cymbals. The music will determine the length, volume, and attack of the crash. Follow through and larger arm motions can be discussed once control over the basic cymbal movement and sound is achieved.

Clinicians

John R. Beck has performed with a wide variety of ensembles in a diversity of musical styles. He is a member of the faculty at the North Carolina School of the Arts, and a percussionist with the Greensboro Symphony Orchestra, Brass Band of Battle Creek, and the Philidor Percussion Group. A former member of the United States Marine Band, he also performed regularly with the National and Baltimore Symphonies, Washington and Baltimore Operas, and the Theater Chamber Players of the Kennedy Center. Beck has toured the United States as a xylophone soloist with the Marine Band, Jack Daniel's Silver Cornet Band, and the New Sousa Band. While living in Washington, D.C. he frequently performed commercial music on drum set and percussion in theaters and recording studios.

Prior to NCSA, Beck served on the faculties of the Universities of Utah, Colorado, and Nevada. He has authored articles for *The Instrumentalist*, *North Carolina Music Educator*, and *Percussive Notes*. An active member of the Percussive Arts Society, he serves on the National Education Committee, is the president of the NC Chapter, and has appeared as a clinician at two PAS International Conventions. He holds degrees from Oberlin College and the Eastman School of Music. John R. Beck is a Yamaha and Zildjian Artist, and his compositions and arrangements are published by HoneyRock.

David L. Collier is currently on the faculty at Illinois State University where he is Director of Percussion Studies. He is also a Music Liaison for ORAT - the "Office of Research in Arts Technology" - at ISU. In this capacity he is active with computers, electronic music, MIDI, and multi-media.

As a performer, Mr. Collier is Principal Timpanist with the Illinois Symphony Orchestra, the Illinois Chamber Orchestra and the Sinfonia da Camera. His recent performance with the Sinfonia da Camera of the Concerto for 8 Obligato Timpani and Orchestra by Johann Fischer was broadcast on National Public Radio's "Performance Today". In addition he performs with DAC --the Digital Arts Consort-- a faculty ensemble at ISU which performs electro-acoustic music featuring MIDI technology. He performed in October 1993 with the University of Illinois Contemporary Chamber Players at the 15th Asian Contemporary Music Festival in Seoul-Taejon, Korea. Other recent performances include a tour of Germany and a concert in Carnegie Hall. Mr. Collier is also active as a freelance percussionist and has performed with artists such as Mitzi Gaynor, Henry Mancini, Johnny Mathis, Tony Bennett, Petula Clark, Aretha Franklin, Tommy Tune, Roger Williams, Shirley Jones, Bobby Vinton and in the NYC Touring productions of A Chorus Line , The Rockettes , State Fair and Annie.

Mr. Collier received his Bachelor of Music degree from Florida State University and his Master of Music degree from Indiana University where he was awarded a Performer's Certificate. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in Percussion Performance and Electronic Music at the University of Illinois. His teachers include Gary Werdesheim, George Gaber, Barry Jekowsky, Richard Holmes, and Tom Siwe. Mr. Collier has also studied composition and electronic music with Scott Wyatt and Eric Lund.

Besides teaching and performing, he is an adjudicator for Drum Corps International, Bands of America and is Percussion Caption Consultant for Drum Corps Midwest. Mr. Collier is a Yamaha Performing Artist and a clinician/endorser for Sabian Cymbals, Latin Percussion and Innovative Percussion. He is also a member of the Percussive Arts Society Education Committee and the Latin Percussion Educational Advisory Board.

Mark Ford is the coordinator of percussion activities at The University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. Mark formerly taught at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. A marimba specialist, Ford has premiered several new works for solo marimba and his first compact disc, *Polaris*, was released in 1996. *The Instrumentalist* has reviewed *Polaris* as “superb and (Ford’s) compositional style is equally outstanding. *Polaris* is an exemplary recording.” Renown marimbist Michael Burritt states that “Mark Ford’s performance and the quality of *Polaris* repertoire is impressive!” Mark’s latest CD, *Athletic Conveyances: Music for Tuba and Percussion* with Jeff Jarvis, was released in January 1999 by Arizona University Recordings. Ford also presents marimba concerts/clinics around the country.

As a composer Mark Ford has written works for solo marimba and percussion ensemble including *Head Talk*, *Polaris*, *Stubernic*, *Motion Beyond*, *One-Eyed Jacks* and *Standup Shadow*. His compositions have been performed at universities and conventions throughout the world including The Eastman School of Music, The University of North Texas, PASIC, MENC, and The Midwest Clinic. Ford has also composed and recorded with his steel drum band, Panama Steel.

Mark serves on the Executive Board of the Percussive Arts Society. He is a past president of both the North Carolina and Tennessee PAS Chapters and has hosted several “PAS Days of Percussion.” He has written over 40 articles that have appeared in *Percussive Notes* and *The North Carolina Music Educator* as well as in the *Tennessee State Music Educators’ Journal*, *The Instrumentalist* and *New Ways*. As a reviewer of new publications, Ford has reviewed over 200 new works for percussion for *Percussive Notes*.

Mark Ford represents the Pearl Corporation of America, Zildjian Company and Innovative Percussion as performing artist and clinician. Mark is a graduate of East Carolina University and The University of North Texas.

Thanks to the following for their support of this clinic:

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Percussive Arts Society	www.pas.org
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