THE PAS EDUCATORS' COMPANION

Volume IV
Fall 2016

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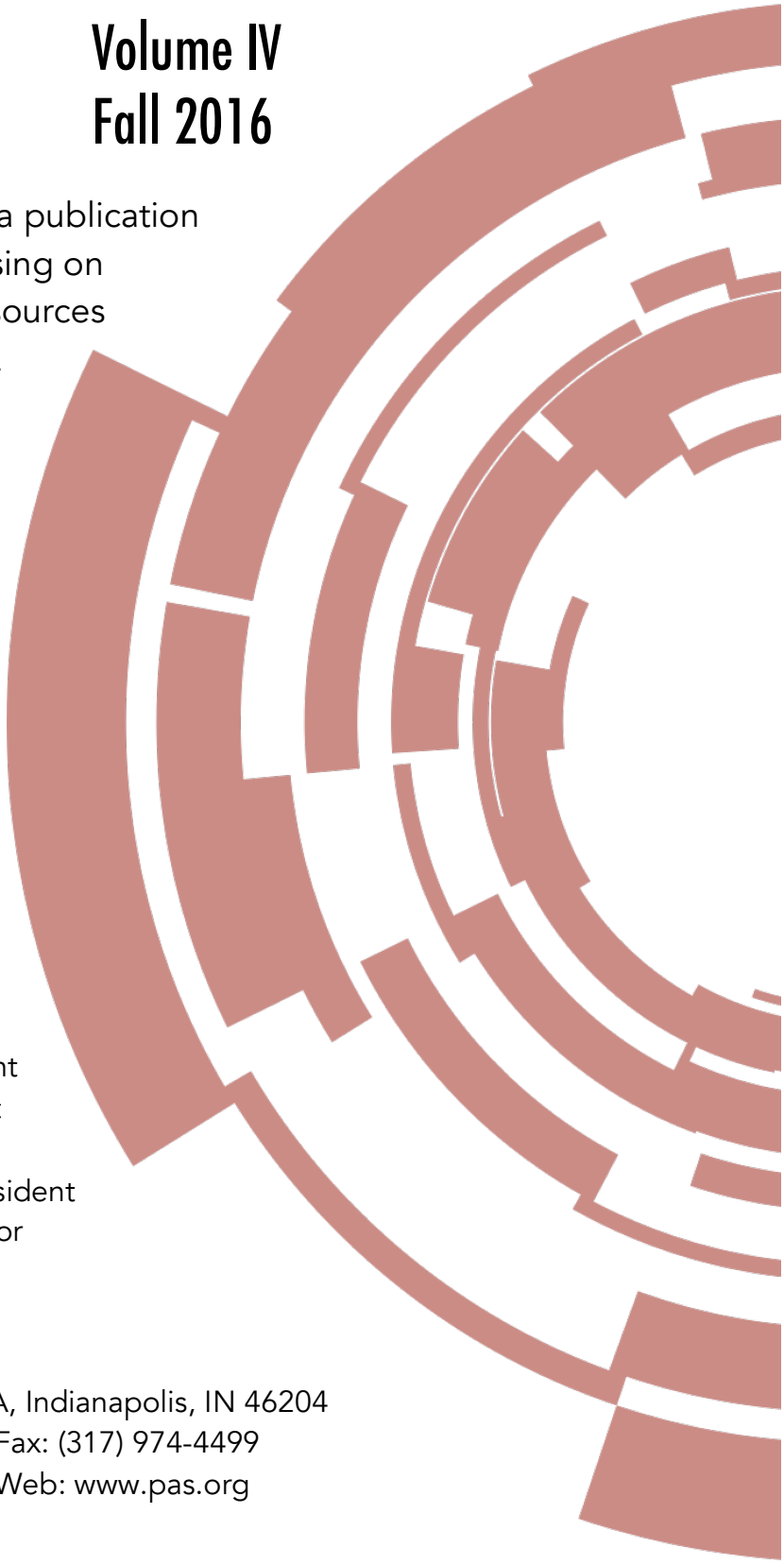
The PAS Educators' Companion is a publication of the Percussive Arts Society focusing on providing percussion education resources to the music education community.



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THE DEVELOPING PERCUSSIONIST: WHY DO THEY STRUGGLE?

Thomas Marceau

As a music educator and percussionist, I often wonder why my young percussion section develops differently than the rest of the ensemble. There are certain aspects of musical understanding and rehearsal etiquette that seem fluent for my wind players, but from one year to the next, pose problems for the majority of my young percussionists. Weak reading and listening skills, lack of focus and/or organization, and the occasional "they are out of control", are all concerns we are familiar with. It begs the question: do percussionists learn differently or are the teachers missing something?

Let me qualify my opening statement with this: there are no absolutes. I've had many successful percussionists graduate and move onto promising careers; I've also taught numerous wind players who have stumbled through basic musical concepts. Having said that, this article focuses on the developing percussionist and those common concerns associated with the back of the ensemble.

Some musicians and educators might reference how drumming attracts a "rambunctious" or "distracted" personality, in an effort to justify the shortcomings or inadequacies from the section. It makes sense; we are hitting stuff, right? Well, no. Having spent several years in the classroom, I can confidently say that colorful personalities are abundant in all sections of the ensemble. As educators, we should consider the reason why our students are struggling. Would changing the approach to instruction and clarifying the teacher expectations result in a different outcome? It is important to be organized and efficient in the way we teach our percussion students.

My percussionists can't recognize notes on the treble or bass clef. Why?

The importance of note reading seems to be at the heart of many beginner wind and string lessons (Suzuki aside). Students might learn one or two notes per week and then apply those notes to their lesson materials and elementary band music. There is a steady pace set for learning, allowing the player to progress as the ensemble music increases in difficulty.

A percussionist's introduction to discerning note names and pitches is often quite different. Students that are fortunate enough to begin reading notes at the elementary level are often in very good shape. Since percussionists are required to learn multiple instruments at the same time, their time should be split between mallet and battery percussion. In effect, their initial progress in regard to note reading may be slower than their peers. The key is to then continue their development throughout middle school and into high school. Ideally, their reading skills on battery and mallet percussion will progress at approximately the same pace. Typically speaking, the majority of percussionists read rhythms with more fluency than notes. That gap in skill seems to get wider as they get older and the music gets more complicated. The problem occurs when they are expected to play complicated mallet parts that far exceed their reading skills; this is when students are forced to enter survival mode. They begin compensating by memorizing music, using visual patterns to memorize melodies, writing pitch names in their parts and for those really struggling, labeling the bars of the instrument with the appropriate note names. This type of learning is not sequential or methodical and unfortunately, has long-term negative effects on how the percussionist approaches music and their instrument.

Percussion education continues to advance in the area of teaching mallet percussion, and we need to continue to reinforce those skills. Make it part of every lesson; there are lesson books designed to give instruction on snare drum and melodic instruments simultaneously. Some schools do not have the required instruments to teach mallet percussion, however, we must continue to train percussionists to play mallet instruments. Is asking a student to rent or purchase a bell set any different than asking them to rent or purchase a saxophone?

My percussionists struggle with note values. Why?

When we teach beginning wind players what a quarter note or half note is, we can explain it in two parts: duration of time and duration of sound. The concept of time doesn't pose a problem for percussionists; down and upbeats function the same across the board. However, explaining the duration of sound on a drum pad (which is where most beginner lessons take place) poses basic problems. The pad or snare drum doesn't offer any controllable duration of sound unless playing a roll. The sound starts and finishes based on external elements such as the size of the room and the size of the drum. How do we explain the difference between a dotted quarter note and a quarter note followed by an eighth rest when they sound exactly the same on a drum pad or snare drum? Unless you are teaching these concepts on an instrument with controllable sustain, the concept of note duration can be lost. I would propose reinforcing these skills using other vehicles. The concept of subdivision accompanied with down and upbeats always seems to help me when teaching note values. Having percussionists vocalize the counting while playing has also helped me in the past; allow them to do this with their internal and external voice.

Ironically, my percussionists don't understand basic rhythms. Why?

Many of us will construct our small group lessons around lesson books and band literature. In my humble opinion, a sure-fire way to set percussionists up for failure is to only focus on band literature in lessons. Band literature will not always supply enough in the way of rhythmic development and often times it is much easier than where we'd like our players to be in terms of skill level. Also, all of the parts are different, so teaching a single rhythmic concept is relatively difficult in that particular setting. Is the suspended cymbal player being challenged rhythmically? Is the bass drum part ideal for explaining subdivision? Are the mallet players simply using their tonal memory to play parts? Rhythmic concepts must be taught and reinforced in small group lessons. Remember, some of your percussionists might not play in every piece. The pieces they do play in might not require them to use their counting skills. Teaching only to the band literature is an easy way for previously learned skills to be lost.

My percussionists aren't focused in the back. Why?

There are several layers to the 'focus' issue, but let's start here… Consider where they are in the band. Go into any academic or elective classroom and you might notice the students in the back drift more often than those who sit closer to the front. There is something to be said about proximity to the instructor and how that affects students' attention level. If you don't believe it, place your percussionists in the front for a day and flutes in the back. You just might discover your flutes are suddenly distracted and your percussionists are suddenly attentive musical geniuses (no promises on the last statement). Also consider your ratio of players to parts. Do you have ten percussionists in the back and three parts available? Are those students who aren't playing anything actively engaged? Have you assigned them anything else to do? If not, they will lose focus. There are a few tips you might consider for keeping your percussionists occupied. If you aren't a purist, you might try doubling the wind parts in the mallet percussion; it keeps your players engaged and reading. You might also consider doubling snare/battery parts on practice pads. You could think of them as understudies for important parts; it also helps when you have a student miss the concert because of a poorly timed cold. Also, it's very easy to focus 90% of your time on the winds and forget about the kids in the back during a rehearsal. Even as a percussionist, I find myself doing this occasionally, be aware of the section. On a side note, if you typically have too many percussionists in your high school band, consider how many feeder schools you have, and then discuss how many beginners should actually be started at the elementary level. I understand the concept of letting children select their instrument, but as band directors, we have a responsibility to create well-balanced ensembles with students who are engaged.

My percussionists seem disorganized in the back. Why?

Consider this… The wind players have assigned seats and folders with their music inside. They don't move around, they play a single instrument throughout the entire rehearsal, and there is predictability between pieces. Percussionists share everything; they use the same instruments, sometimes play with the same mallets, read off of the same music and often need to shuffle around the section. This may seem simple, but it is a learned skill and needs to be explained. How to set up a functioning section in terms of instrument, mallet and music placement is not something that should be left unexplained. The issue of setting up a functioning percussion section is larger than the scope of this article, but I will leave you with a few helpful hints. Consider how the setup may vary based on your rehearsal space; organize your instruments in a manner that allows for easy flow between playing stations. I have had to change my perfect-scenario setup, to accommodate a room many times. Have a trap table near each playing station. When percussionists have a place to put mallets and accessories, it can make for easier playing situations and smoother transitions between instruments. Make sure they use folders for their music with some type of organization system. Assign a folder to each student, playing station, or piece; find what works best for you. Put your rehearsal order on the board, everyday, and remind them to look at it. Mental preparation and preparation of the physical space can make a big difference in the flow of a rehearsal.

My percussionists aren't listening. Why are they always playing fortissimo?

Consider this: every flute lesson utilizes the flute. A flutist practices all musical elements on the same instrument, every day. There is consistency. Now consider your percussion lessons. Do they practice on drum pads in their lessons and move to a snare drum in rehearsal? A drum pad is very forgiving in terms of how hard you can play before making your ears bleed; mf on the drum pad can easily translate into ff on the snare drum. Also, playing *ppp* and *ff* feels vastly different when moving from the pad to an actual drum. There is a tangible feel and touch that must be developed while playing on a concert instrument. Additionally, they are placed in the back of the band; simple location might make them feel like they need to overplay in order to be heard. I have found that giving them specific parts to listen to within the band can help them in the effort to effectively balance their sound.

My percussionists aren't making their lessons. Why?

In my experience, I rarely have a large percentage of percussion students miss lessons, but I've had some colleagues express this concern. Consider the following: when do you schedule percussion lessons? Do they happen to fall on Fridays? If we schedule our lessons in score order, that makes sense. It also makes sense that students might already have several tests on a Friday and/or are already thinking about the weekend. If you're having issues with lesson attendance/focus, consider a mid-week lesson as an experiment.

As an educator, you realize change is needed when your students ask, "why can't we read notes?" or "why does the rest of the band understand this?" We need to make sure we aren't our own worst enemies in this educational process. If you find that your students are struggling, it may be time to reevaluate the process. Drumming can be an amazing and inspiring tool, bringing children and young adults to music. As music teachers, it's important to constantly reevaluate our methods. Let's make it fun and let's set them up for success. •

Thomas Marceau has been on the percussion faculty at Finger Lakes Community College, NEMC and held the assistantship for percussion at Ithaca College where he instructed percussion techniques. Tom is currently an adjunct instructor of percussion studies at Five Towns College as well as the director of bands at Mt. Sinai High School in Mt. Sinai, NY. As a composer for marimba, his works are used on collegiate and competition repertoire lists around the country. His first solo album for percussion, Moments, has recently been released and is now available through HoneyRock.net. Dr. Marceau holds degrees from Stony Brook University (DMA), Ithaca College (MM) and the Crane School of Music (BM). His percussion teachers include Dr. Robert Bridge, Pete DeSalvo, Gary Hodges, Eduardo Leandro, Ernest Muzquiz, James Petercsak and Gordon Stout. Tom is also a proud member of the Percussive Arts Education Committee.

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO SIGHT-READING ON A KEYBOARD INSTRUMENT

Oliver Molina

From my personal and teaching experience, keyboard or mallet percussion reading can be a huge hurdle to overcome. This article provides teachers with information needed to increase the reading ability of their mallet percussionists. Sight-reading is a skill, and like any other skill, needs to be developed over time. I have broken down a simple sight-reading guide to help get your students on the right track to success.

Compared to their other instrumental counterparts, a severe lack of reading skill is frequently common with percussionists. There are several reasons why this may occur, which may include a lack of tactile response while playing, inherent instrument specific techniques, availability and accessibility to instruments, variety of instruments to gain expertise, the need to memorize versus read, bar size differences between instruments, and the list may go on and on. The reasons can be expounded upon with another entire article by itself.

The 5 S's of sight-reading:

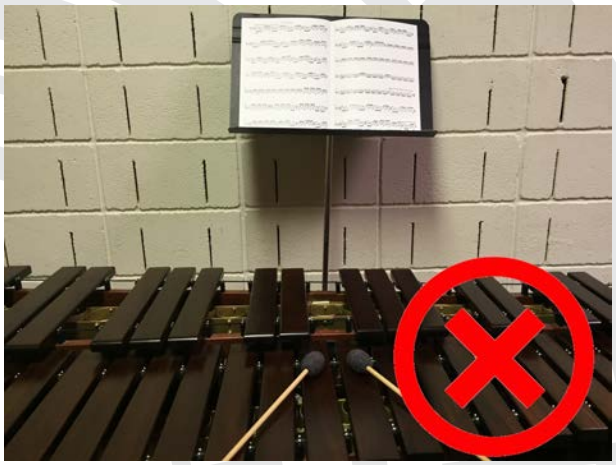
- Setup – the environment
- Sight – the visual
- Scales – the kinesthetic
- Study – the "science"
- Success – the final product (putting it all together)

Setup:

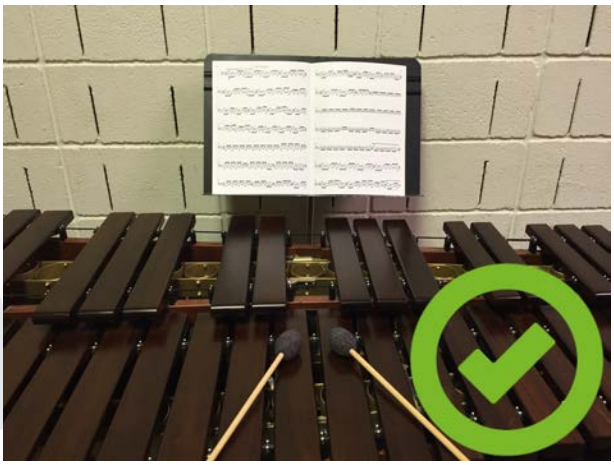
To ensure success you will need to make sure everything is in place before your students play a note for efficiency and ease. If the keyboard instrument height can be adjusted, place the height of the instrument where it is comfortable for the wrist and arms to move while playing. This spot is usually higher than the hips and lower than the waist or belly button area of the student. Just as you would tell a wind player to move the instrument to their body to play instead of bringing their body to the instrument, it is crucial to bring the keyboard instrument to the proper height. Take time and check the keyboard height to so that it is in proper playing position for each student.

For most percussion instruments having the music stand high and in the sight line of the conductor is beneficial. However, for keyboard instruments, it may be more beneficial to have the music low and near the keyboard instead up high (Example 1). Having the music near the notes you will be hitting will make it easier to see the music and bars at the same time (Example 2). The main reason for the low music stand will be discussed in more detail in the next section on sight.

Example 1



Example 2



Once the music stand is at the proper height center the stand and body so that the entire range of the musical passage can be accessed easily. Find the lowest note in the piece and place your left mallet on the bar and find the highest note and place your right mallet on that bar. Position the music and body in the middle of this area between your highest note (right hand) and lowest note (left hand). Do not default to the middle of the keyboard but spend some time quickly analyzing the music and finding the range needed on the sheet music. If the music uses a wide range or even the entire instrument it may be beneficial to set up the music where most of the notes are located. This will reduce the strain to see the music and reach to strike the notes on the instrument.

Sight:

Part of the equation for sight-reading is sight. Getting your students to trust their peripheral vision is a major component to sight-reading success. Here are some ways to check out the scope of peripheral vision:

1) Have the students stretch out their arms in front of them and with their index fingers pointed next to one another. While staring straight ahead and keeping your arms straight, slowly move your hands and arms in opposite directions to the left and right. Keep moving them until you can no longer see them and then bring them back into the field of vision.

2) To check peripheral vision on the Y-axis, place the index fingers pointed toward one another and slowly move one hand up and the other down while staring straight forward. Again, keep moving the fingers until they are no longer seen and then bring them back into view. This should be a nice range of peripheral vision that is needed when playing.

In application to keyboard playing have the students stare at the music, and move their mallets to the left and right. They should be able to see both the music, and the mallets and bars at the same time. (Example 2). As discussed in the previous section on setup, it is more beneficial to have the stand near the keyboard and not high away from the bars.

Remember to have the students look up while playing. They will feel very insecure about hitting the right notes without looking and they will want to look back and forth as much as possible. Think of the keyboard being the shining bright light of the sun. They can glance at the sun but be careful not to get caught looking too long or it will burn.

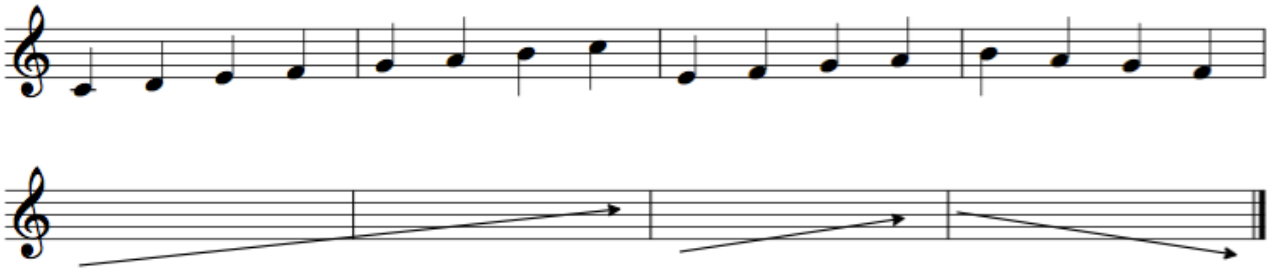
Next, get the students used to the layout and location of notes on the keyboard. Have them find and recognize the pattern of the two and three accidental bar groupings. This will serve as landmarks to find all the notes on the instrument. Some beginning keyboard method books start with the C scale (all white notes) while others use accidentals as the first notes to learn. Beginning method books also start with larger notation and note heads to make things easier to see then gradually move to smaller notation.

As your students improve in finding the notes on the instrument, they need to develop their skills in locating the notes on the musical staff. Do not allow your students to write the note names in their music. It may be a quick fix but will be a bigger problem down the road. It will only serve as a crutch where they will be reading their handwriting instead of reading and relating the note head to the keyboard bar. Instead, you can have them say the note names aloud while pointing to or touching the notes on the keyboard. Some method books come with the note names written in beforehand. If possible, I recommend blacking out the note names.

The next step is to start looking at bigger chunks of music, similar to the way you read words. You do not read each individual letter to say the word. You are able to take in entire words and even look ahead while reading. The same can be true when reading music. You do not need to read each individual note head or beat. Instead, take in the general line and shape of the music by taking a quick snapshot and moving your eyes

ahead of the actual music you are playing (Example 3). Think of sight-reading as short term memorizing. Taken from a clinic by J.B Smith, you can test this by having the student look at one measure of music then play it while covering up the music (Example 4). During lessons I sometimes follow along with an index card and cover up the music my students are playing. This keeps them looking ahead and moving forward with the music.

Example 3



Example 4

Other approaches to sight-reading:

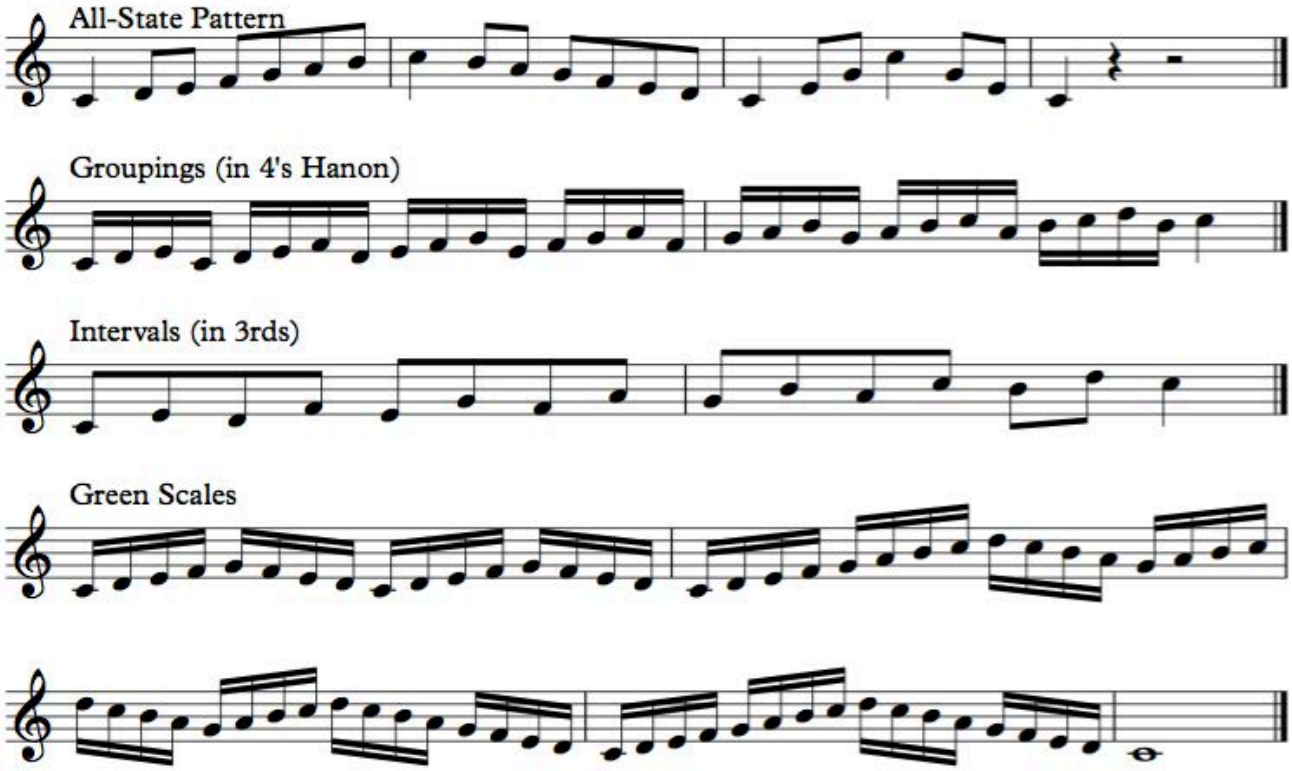
- Note by note – most common and rudimentary way that we read
- Phrases – take in more than a note or a count but look for the overall length and direction of a phrase
- Intervals – notice the direction of the line but also whether it is stepwise or with leaps. Instead of saying the note names (A, D, E) look at the intervallic relationship between the notes (Perfect 4th up, Major 2nd up). This may be notes from line to line, space to space, line to space, or space to line. Look for common patterns that make up different intervals. An easy way to practice is to take simple melodies or etudes and transpose them to different keys. Also, try reading in other clefs (alto and tenor) to test if you are really reading by intervals.
- Harmonically (analytically) – Western tonal music works best for this approach but knowing your music theory will help recognize chords, scales, and musical motifs that will make reading easier. Finding chord progressions and harmonic motion will determine what notes will be used.

Scales (arpeggios, and stickings):

Just like using your sight or peripheral vision to hit the correct notes you will need to use your kinesthetic sense as well. Scales are great to build up muscle memory and are paramount in gaining facility around the instrument. Most pieces are written in a key that will serve as a guide to play certain notes and stay away from others. For example, if the music is written in the key of C you know that your mallet should not wander to any accidentals or black notes.

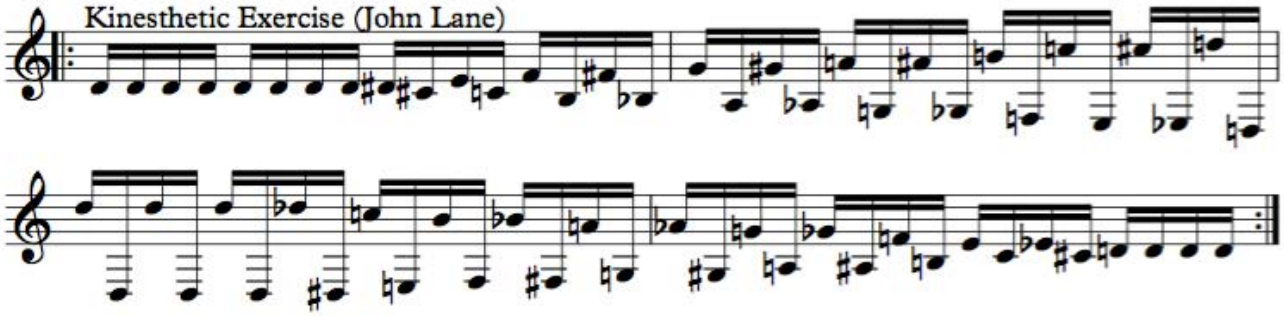
When practicing scales, it is beneficial to find many different variations to practice instead of the usual all-state patterns. Experiment with different groupings, intervals, patterns, Green scales (Example 5), and even use improvisation over the scale.

Example 5



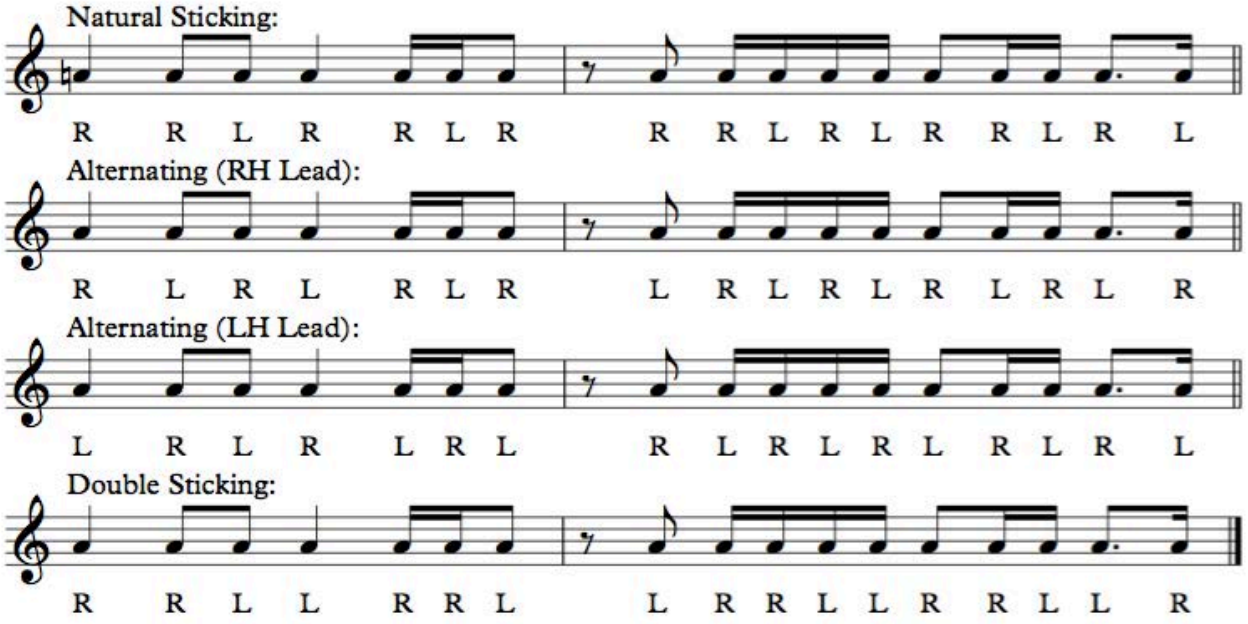
Example 6 is an exercise recommended by Dr. John Lane to gain kinesthetic awareness on the keyboard. The end goal is to make moving to any note in the scale feel natural and unforced. Arpeggios are also very useful for bigger leaps and help outline a scale that is being used. It will be very beneficial to learn various scales and modes to learn the shape of the line on the keyboard but can also work out some music theory. Again, play these scales and arpeggios while note looking at the keyboard. Look up or find something for your students to stare at on the music stand.

Example 6



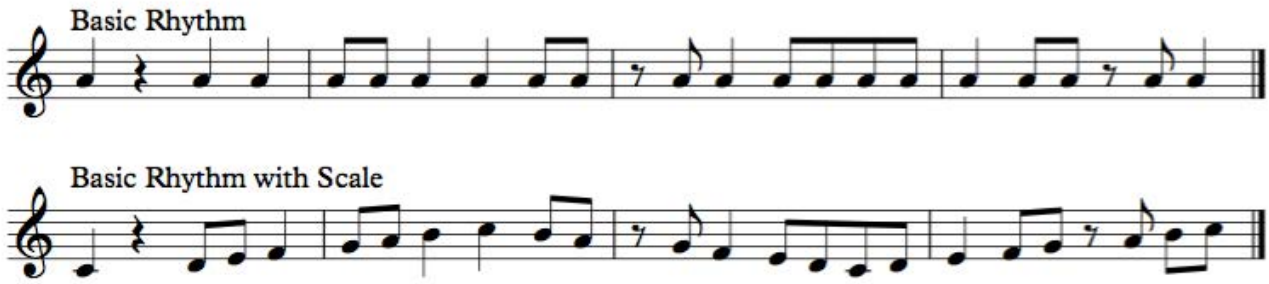
Another fundamental area of concern is sticking. Sticking can be tricky on the keyboard percussion due to the tempo, direction of the line, intervals, etc. I highly recommend being able to play stick control and timing exercises using different stickings to help gain a better understanding of rhythm and implement facility (Example 7).

Example 7



It helps to separate the different musical elements so when you put them together you have a nice foundation to build upon. Just as you would focus on marching and playing separately before putting them together you can do the same with reading music. An activity I have used my students include using basic rhythm examples and applying different scale patterns to them (Example 8). I will have my students play the rhythm, then the scale, and finally the scale with the rhythm, changing scale degrees on each note head. This can be done with your whole ensemble and is great in learning scales and fingerings.

Example 8



Another way to build up kinesthetic awareness is an idea I took from Dr. Stephen Hemphill. He recommends putting a barrier between the students field of vision to the keyboard so the student can only see the sheet music. I hold up a 16"x20" piece of sturdy foam board at chest level so the students can not cheat by looking at the keyboard but solely depend on their muscle memory to play the correct notes.

Study:

Here is a list of things from my friend, Dr. Luis Rivera, that highlights what to look for and analyze before playing:

- Clef(s) and key signature(s)
- Time Signatures (tempo markings)
- Accidentals and key modulations
- Articulations (rolls, dead strokes, pedaling, etc.)
- Any odd looking rhythmic/melodic/musical ideas (double-flat, syncopation, extended rests)
- Stickings
- Dynamics
- Phrase markings (slurs, *ritardando*, *crescendo*, *accelerando*, etc.)
- Patterns (verbatim repetition, motives, sequences)

Success

You helped prepare your student with the other S's in the outline and now you are ready to tackle sight-reading. Here are some quick reminders as they read:

- Slow and steady wins the race
- Pick a tempo that works for the toughest or trickiest part
- Use a metronome
- Focus on the rhythm
- If the notes go up the staff go to right, if the notes go down go to the left (direction of line)
- Always look ahead
- Take in and look at bigger chunks of music (phrases)
- Continue through your mistakes. Do not stop until you reach the end.

Supplemental Resources:

Here is a short list of keyboard method books that focus on reading. Most are focused toward the beginner but some have a bigger scope for progress.

- Kite, Rebecca – *Reading Mallet Percussion Music*
- Eyles, Randall – *Mallet Percussion for Young Beginners: A Peripheral Vision Primer*
- Goldenberg, Morris – *Modern School for Xylophone, Marimba, and Vibraphone*
- Green, George Hamilton – *Instruction Course for Xylophone*
- Hickman, David – *Music Speed Reading*
- Peters, Mitchell – *Fundamentals Method for Mallets Book 1*
- Wessels, Mark – *Fresh Approach to Mallet Percussion*
- Whaley, Garwood – *Fundamental Studies for Mallets*
- Wylie, Kennan – *Simple Steps to Successful Mallets and More Percussion*

Below are some excellent resources to further develop sight-reading skills.

Speed Note Reading Tutor (http://www.vicfirth.com/education/keyboard/speednotereading.html) is an interactive online resource from Vic Firth. The web-based game goes through a methodical progression of learning and recognizing the notes on the staff and keyboard. The game has 10 different levels of difficulty that includes 100 different practice examples in each round. Students can challenge themselves at the rookie, pro, and all-star speeds. This is a fun resource to play and can be used with your students at home when they may not be in behind an instrument.

Music Theory Exercises (http://www.musictheory.net/exercises) is another web-based application that hits several areas of music. The website has games that test you over note identification, key signature, intervals, chords, and many more. You can fully customize what you would like to be tested over so you can target a particular skill or concept.

Sight-reading Factory (https://www.sightreadingfactory.com) is etude generator that is available online or through an app for your phone or tablet. This program is fully customizable with varying levels of difficulty of rhythm and range. The app creates etudes for the common band and orchestra instruments and is great for creating playing tests. The app is subscription based but has a free trial period.

Sight-reading Machine (http://www.sightreadingmachine.com) is another app that provides short etudes to read daily. Each customizable etude is very manageable and short to fit all on your phone or tablet screen. Although the app does not have percussion specific instrument options you can select other instruments in different clefs. A unique feature the app has is a built-in metronome with audio playback of the etude. The app counts the student in to keep the student going and working through their mistakes.

Practice Instruments

Access to instruments can be problematic for percussionists. Other instrumentalists often have personal or rented instruments they can take home and use. Percussionists, on the other hand, usually do not own all the instruments they will play, especially the bigger concert instruments. If the band room or practice areas are not available outside of class time it may be difficult for students to practice. Although the beginner bell kits or playing with your index fingers on a piano or electronic keyboard may suffice, there are other instrument options for your students to practice at home.

Several instrument manufacturers such as Adams, Adventure, Bergerault, Coe, Majestic, Musser, Premier, and Yamaha have created student practice model versions of various keyboard instruments that are worth investigating. Prices range from under a grand to about half the price of a professional concert instrument. Adventure and Coe Percussion make a full size practice marimba without resonators at a significantly lower price.

Conclusion:

Use this outline of the S's of sight-reading to make huge strides in your students' musical ability. Getting better at sight-reading is a journey not a destination. The more you get your students to invest into sight-reading the better they will become at it. Raid your music library and put anything and everything in front of them to read. Get their hands on other instrument method books (flute, trumpet, violin, etc.) and any percussion ensemble music. Guitar etudes make great four-mallet reading and beginner piano music can work as duet pieces. Sight-read as a class. Be creative with using class time to practice sight-reading. Show your students the importance of sight-reading by dedicating time weekly or even daily to this important skill.

For more information and ideas on mallet sight-reading please check out the list of articles and resources below. I also recommend visiting the FUNdamentals page on PAS.org. There are a wide variety of percussion topics that can help you teach and prepare lesson plans. •

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INCORPORATING YOUR PERCUSSIONIST IN CHAMBER MUSIC WITH NON-PERCUSSIONISTS

Jamie Wind Whitmarsh

Percussionists have a large body of repertoire that involves performing with other percussionists. There are few things better than locking in a groove and connecting moving parts; we love it! However, if one considers the skills wind and string players develop when performing chamber music—breathing together, eye contact, moments of uncertainty followed by everyone magically playing together—it becomes clear that these skills are not emphasized by pieces written only for percussionists (especially at the high-school level; performers in professional percussion groups have likely already developed these skills by engaging with non-percussionists). Percussion instruments are so attack-driven (that is, if we are not exactly together it shows enormously) that we must prepare our entrances with precision to ensure that our performance does not sound sloppy. This can remove much of the—for lack of a better term—"chamber-ness" that gives music its life. This skill is emphasized in other instruments, so why not percussion? It can only lead to a section that is more capable of performing with vitality and confidence.

There are several avenues by which the chronically over-worked band director may enhance these skills within their percussion section. The easiest way to help students develop these skills is to assign them to perform with one instrumentalist of another type. This could be for a solo and ensemble contest, or perhaps a chamber music concert. The holiday season, in particular, affords many opportunities for students to perform within the community. Just think how a vibraphone/bassoon duet could increase your program's visibility, while providing a service for the community and developing chamber music skills in your students! Another method might be to replace existing instruments within a traditional setting with a percussionist. Perhaps you want to program a woodwind quintet, but don't have an oboist – assign one of your percussionists to perform on marimba instead. This approach is certainly unorthodox, but the benefits can outweigh the skeptical looks you will receive. It may seem strange, but this can teach your students so much about music and communication. This method can also help develop skills in your non-percussionists, particularly rhythmic accuracy. (I do not recommend replacing transposing instruments; better to limit substitutions for flute, oboe, bassoon, trombone, and tuba.)

If you can find the time and the repertoire to make this sort of project happen for your students, I believe that you will see a difference in their playing. Percussionists who engage musically with non-percussionists will have their minds opened up to a new way of hearing and feeling music. High school students in general need more chamber music experience, but percussionists especially need to be exposed to different ways of feeling time and phrasing. Performing with musicians who create sound in a completely different manner can help. •

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ENCOURAGING A CONSISTENT APPROACH TO AUDITIONS

Matthew Geiger

He began by putting his right foot at the center of the free throw line; this aligned his shooting hand with the rim. Then, he would wipe his hands dry on his socks. The referee would hand him the ball, and if he could not see the logo, he would spin the ball around until he could. Then -- as if all in one motion -- he would dribble three times, take a deep breath, and shoot. Kyle Macy's free throw routine became iconic, and led him to the current record for the highest free throw percentage in Kentucky Basketball history. Much like in basketball, where the shooter has to block out the noise of the crowd and not succumb to the pressure of the big shot, a musical performer must also find ways to overcome nerves and stress to play his or her best. All of the preparation in the practice room can fade away if nerves and stage fright get in the way. There are tons of auditions that your students will have to go through as they venture through their musical journeys, from chair placement and drumline to all-state and college auditions. From an early age, students can create a consistent approach that will lead to success throughout their lives. This leads us to the question, what are some things that you can teach your students so that they can prepare their very own percussion pre-shot routine?

The Preparation

Let me first begin by detailing my own pre-shot routine as a demonstration. The first thing I do, even before entering an audition room, is ensure that I have all my mallets, sticks, towels and necessary instruments ready to bring into the room. As the doors open, I go in and set up every instrument in the room to the proper location and correct height if possible. The height and angle of a snare drum stand, for example, is easy to adjust, and failure to prepare the drum can result in a very poor performance, regardless of practice and planning. My mallets and sticks are placed on black towels and music stands near the instruments so they are easily exchanged. Once the room is completely setup, I go to the first instrument. If I am given the opportunity to choose an instrument to start, instead of saying it does not matter, I will try to take control of the pace of the audition by choosing the instrument with which I feel most comfortable for that particular audition. For snare drum as an example, I will then turn the snares on and place the sticks in my hands the same

way every time, with the *Innovative Percussion* logo covered by my thumb. With my hands relaxed to my side, I will begin to get the tempo of the first piece in my head -- usually through a favorite 90's alternative rock song or Rush tune -- then I will use that tempo to sing the first few bars in my head. Finally, I bring my sticks up, take a deep breath in and out, relax my body, and count myself in. With the last beat, I cue myself with a breath and natural prep to start. All of this preparation can be divided into three main categories:

- The Setup
- The Stress
- The Start

Take care of business before focusing on the performance. This logistical tip alludes to the setup of the room, the height of the instruments, and the placement of the mallets, sticks and music. If your students make sure the room is set up the way they planned, then the only thing they need to do when they enter performance mode is perform. This also includes having things ready outside of the audition room. If the student is bringing the school's tambourine or snare drum, be certain that the instruments are fully prepared and ready to be played. These small, seemingly insignificant steps are all major factors in alleviating some of the stress of an audition.

Stress is a difficult aspect of all auditions, but students can learn to work with their nerves and the pressure. In terms of the preparation, the stress can hit its highest right before the first note. This is why a consistent approach to the first note helps control and counter some nervousness. The use of popular music or songs the student enjoys can be great ways to find tempos, as well as relax the student into a comfortable and familiar place. For example, *Tom Sawyer* is around 88 bpm, which provides me that specific tempo as well as a smile in remembrance of a great band. Also, it is important for the student to wait to start until he or she is ready. Sometimes nerves and sweat kick in while holding the sticks before beginning, and the student will force the first notes without thinking just to get it over with. This creates a perpetual sense of trying to regain composure, instead of a much-more-desired composed and prepared start that could happen with just a few deep breaths and wiping the sweat off the percussionist's hands.

With the mental preparation complete, all that the student must plan and practice is how to begin the piece. Here it might be useful to sing the first few bars of the piece, or the most rhythmically active section. By ensuring the tempo is comfortable for the beginning or the densest phrases, the entire piece can start positively. Adrenaline can wreak havoc on an audition day, and that can make the performer start much faster than anticipated. Staying relaxed and establishing the pulse before beginning is a way to fight that adrenaline. Once the tempo is established and the pulse is felt throughout the body,

students should take a breath to cue themselves to begin the solo, just as they would in a large ensemble with a conductor. Percussionists have a unique opportunity to mirror a conducting baton, especially with snare drum sticks. The prep of a baton can be demonstrated and imitated by your percussion students to practice breathing before they play -- a crucial element to performance yet often overlooked for percussionists.

The combination of these three challenges, the setup, the stress and the start, allows an auditionee to practice the moments leading up to the performance. With consistent practice, the student will become more comfortable and therefore far more successful with the audition process. Kyle Macy's setup placed his body in the exact location he needed and also confirmed the ball was rotated properly, he dried his hands on his socks to help calm his nerves, and then before starting the shot, he always dribbled three times and took a deep breath. Swish.

The Audition Environment

In college basketball -- like most athletics -- the home team has a distinct advantage. As the crowd roars, the away team feels disparaged and the home squad encouraged. So which environment should your students expect in their auditions? For anyone who has ever taken an audition, he or she knows the isolation inherent in playing alone. Auditionees often assume the role of the visitors, walking into a crowd against them, when in reality everyone wants each student to succeed. As a director, it is important to instill this perspective to give your students courage in an audition environment. There are a few other environmental factors that your students can control to experience a positive audition day:

- Be on time
- Understand the schedule and structure of the audition
- Concentrate on success

The first two points seem to go hand in hand. It is very important for students to understand the expectations of each audition, both in the schedules they receive as well as the material to be prepared. Emphasizing punctuality allows the student to begin the audition process on the right foot. This will allow for a much calmer and more enjoyable experience for the students. However, they should be aware that if they are running behind schedule, they should avoid letting delays affect the mental preparations. They should also be prepared for additional unexpected time. Often auditions become delayed and students are given extra time that they had not planned. Teach students skills to maintain mental focus and physical preparedness. Two quick examples would be: when given an extra ten minutes before an all-state audition, one could walk through the setup period once more to practice the feeling of walking into a room of fans and

supporters, and when given time before an audition or performance in colder weather, it is important for percussionists to continue to move their fingers and wrists for circulation as well as to remain relaxed and warmed-up.

The great game of golf can be used to illustrate the third point above. Harbour Town Golf Links in South Carolina is home to the scenic and iconic lighthouse. Hole 18 on the golf course features an excessively long par 4 with trees to the right, ocean to the left, and the lighthouse stretching beyond the green. As you scan from the tee box, you see these hazards and the beautiful green fairway in front of you. Your thoughts begin as you plan the drive, "Go straight, don't go in the water, don't go in the water, don't go in the water". You watch as your brand new Titleist Pro V1 hooks left and proceeds to splash into the water. If your students focus on the myriad of possibilities that could go wrong when they start the audition, inevitably one of those will come true. Instead, teach them to think about all the things that will go well when they enter the room. To return to the original allegory, Kyle Macy's free-throw routine always incorporated drying his hands on his socks, which had a far greater purpose than just getting rid of the sweat. This allowed him to focus despite the thousands of distractions and to get into his own world, the world where he could fixate on the shot going through the basket.

The Pressure

The third and final portion of the audition preparation deals in helping students handle the pressure and nerves in the audition. There have been several things mentioned previously that can help diminish anxiety, but here is a final bit of advice for your students as they get closer to an audition day.

Pressure and stress are often augmented when a student is in an unfamiliar situation or is underprepared. The latter rests mainly on the student's practice time and repertoire, yet dealing with an unfamiliar situation can be rehearsed and repeated. The best way to practice handling an unfamiliar situation is to try to get the student to recreate the event while practicing. Students should pretend they are performing a live audition in front of an audience, doing full run-throughs including changing instruments. With percussion auditions, most include two or more instruments and sometimes an instrument change within the music. Have your students practice switching instruments within the musical phrase so that the tempo, pulse and feel never get lost while moving and changing mallets. Another way students can prepare is to practice these full run-throughs in front of other students or directors. The more often students can perform under pressure -- even friendly pressure -- the quicker they will become acclimated to audition environments and improve their abilities to control nerves to perform with confidence.

Consistency is key. All the musical preparation in the world can go awry if students are not prepared for the actual day of the audition. It is important to note that preparing mentally and logistically for the audition day will get the student calmly and confidently to

the instruments, but the musical preparation will take it from there. Even with a refined pre-shot routine, Kyle Macy would never have broken and held the free throw percentage record without endless hours in the gym. With proper practice, percussionists can take control of their auditions and come out with a confident, comfortable, enjoyable, and successful performance. •

Dedicated to a versatile musical approach, Matthew Geiger hopes to continue to champion both new and canonic works through continued study, performance, teaching, and research. His recent performances have focused on solo vibraphone, commissioning new vibraphone works, performing as a soloist in Inner Mongolia, performing alongside Yousif Sheronick at PASIC as well as being named the winner of the 2013 PASIC Solo Vibraphone Competition. He has recorded for the Naxos label, including performing as percussionist and timpanist on the Grammy nominated recording of Darius Milhaud's "L'Orestie". Currently, Matthew is a visiting instructor of jazz and percussion at Morehead State University while also pursuing a Doctorate in percussion performance at the University of Kentucky. He received his Master's degree in percussion performance at the University of Michigan. He proudly endorses Innovative Percussion, Inc.

MASTERING SUSPENDED CYMBAL ROLLS

Joshua J. Knight

Often overlooked and underemphasized, the suspended cymbal is one of the most improperly played instruments in the percussion section. Because of the seemingly simple technical and musical requirements of the instrument, precise pedagogy that creates appropriate sounds and promotes musical expression is often unintentionally excluded.

Many techniques can be used to create a variety of sounds on a suspended cymbal. However, this article will focus on suspended cymbal rolls. Below are the most important contributors to sound production, followed by exercises through which to master a sustained sound and dynamic contrast.

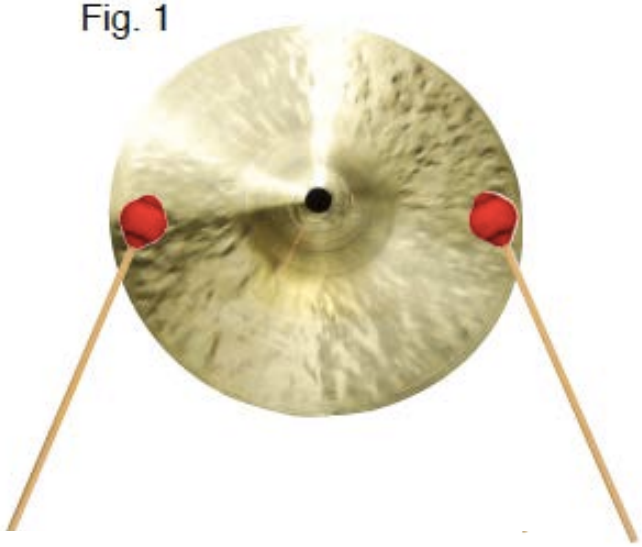
MALLET TYPE - Usually, a medium to soft yarn mallet is preferred, although experimenting with various weights and types of mallets is also necessary. A smaller cymbal will need a lighter mallet where as a large cymbal may need a heavier mallet. This is because a heavy mallet may overwhelm small diameter cymbals, 17" or smaller, and cause it to move erratically, making playing the cymbal difficult. Likewise, too light of a mallet may not allow a large cymbal to vibrate at its full potential.

MALLET HEIGHT - Height contributes greatly to volume, therefore mallet height must be carefully maintained or manipulated, especially during a crescendo. Beginning a crescendo softly, with a low mallet height, and ending loudly, with greater height, is the general rule. However, the speed at which the mallet gains height is important, too. Mallet height should steadily increase, duplicating the wedge shape of the crescendo, rather than all-at-once near the release.

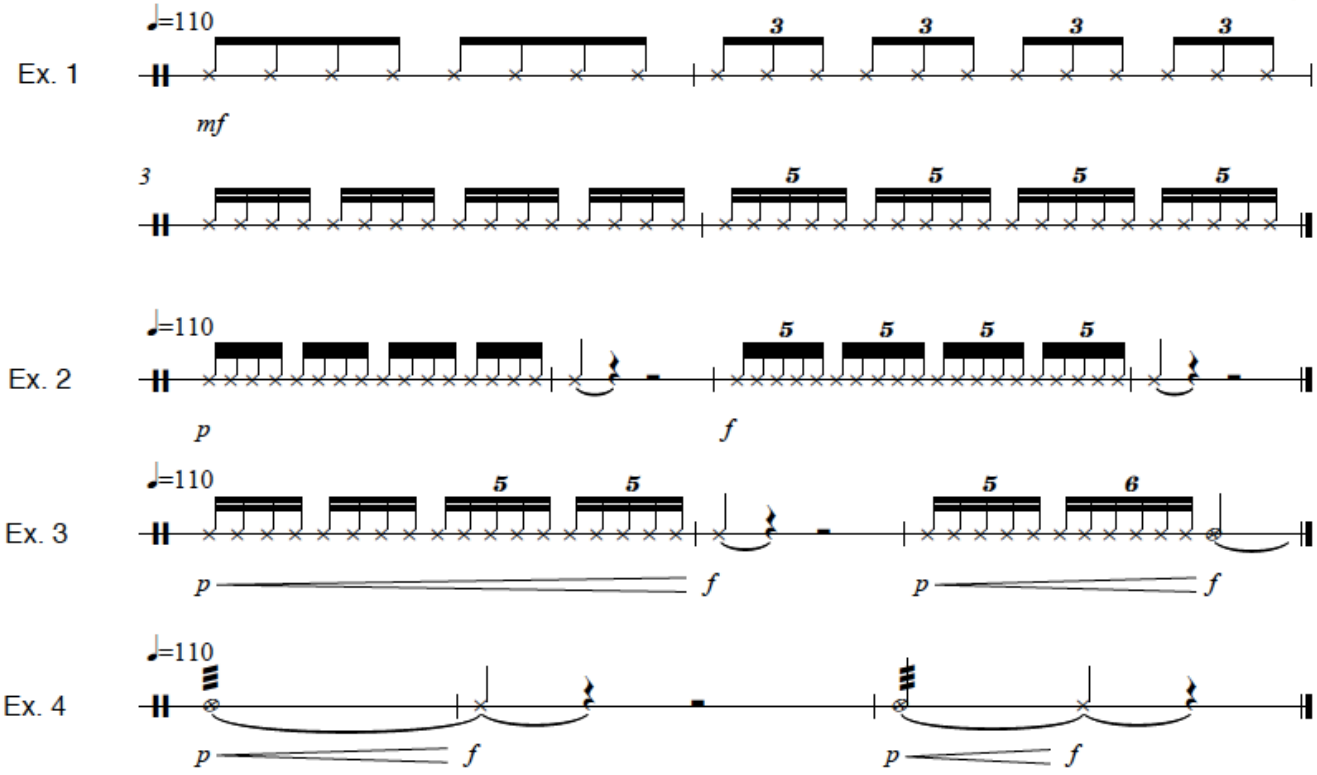
ROLL SPEED - Stroke speed also contributes to volume as well as the intensity and smoothness of the cymbal's sound. The larger the instrument the slower the stroke speed, similar to rolling on a 32" versus a 20" timpano. Choose a speed that allows the cymbal to sound sustained, while feeling relaxed. Choosing strokes that are too fast for your technique will result in tension and lack of control; this is especially common. Roll speed, like stroke height, should be carefully manipulated to achieve greater intensity and volume.

PLAYING AREA & STROKE - The playing area for the cymbal is located approximately half an inch from the edge, with the R and L mallets placed opposite of each other; see figure 1 below. The stroke must be a legato or rebound stoke, and will feel very similar to the stroke on a marimba bar; the absence of true rebound means using more wrist and following through in a natural way. The final right and left stroke should always come off of the cymbal, very similar to the release of a roll on timpani. Because the release of a cymbal roll commonly coincides with a sound that is still vibrating, your release should usually avoid sudden movement or leaving the mallets in the down position. •

Fig. 1

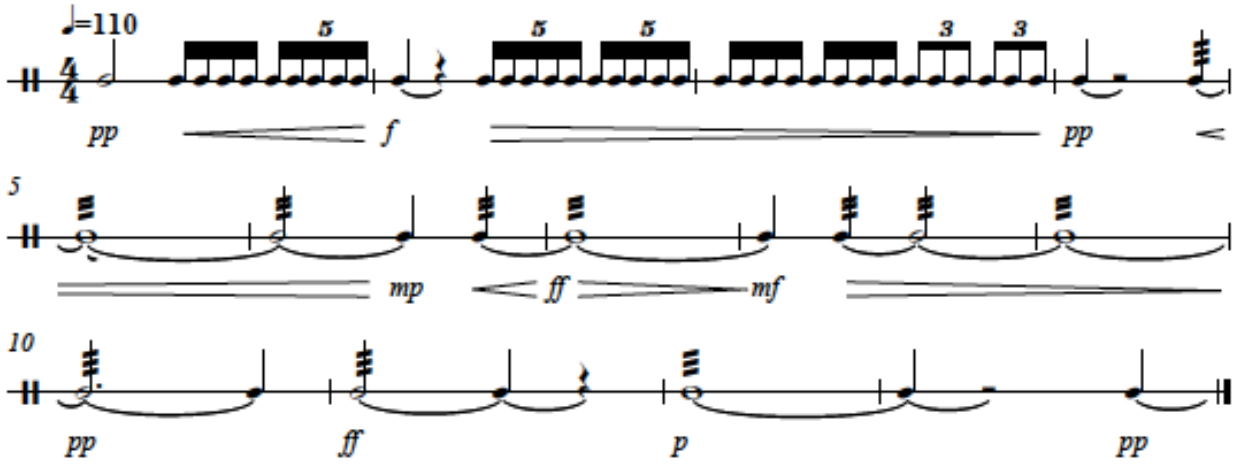


** Use an alternated sticking for each of the exercises below. Also, experiment with a variety of tempos for exercise 4, as well as the etude, remembering to execute note values that best create a smooth and sustained sound.



ETUDE

** After measure 3, use comparable note values/stoke speed for the rolls indicated in order to achieve sustain and smoothness.



Dr. Joshua J. Knight is the newly appointed Assistant Professor of Percussion at Missouri Western State University. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Oklahoma, and earned his Master of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees from the University of Central Arkansas. His teachers include Lance Drege, Blake Tyson, Thomas Burritt, and Benjamin Finley.

Knight has presented and performed at regional and international events such as the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy, Texas Music Educators Association conference, College Music Society regional conference, and numerous state percussion festivals including the Arkansas Day of Percussion, Oklahoma Day of Percussion, and University of Central Arkansas Percussion Festival. As an active performer and clinician Knight has appeared at numerous high schools and universities throughout the United Sates, and has performed with the Abilene Philharmonic, Fort Smith Symphony, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Lawton Philharmonic, Pine Bluff Symphony, and Conway Symphony orchestras. Knight is also active in commissioning new works for percussion that include Inside The Shining Stone by Blake Tyson, published by blaketysonmusic : Shattered by Cody Criswell, published by C-Alan Publications, Halcyon Days by Nathan Daughtrey, published by CAlan Publications and most recently, The Wind That Turns The World by Blake Tyson, published by blaketysonmusic. Knight's article, Trends and Developments Through Thirty Prominent Snare Drum Method Books is a featured cover story in Percussive Notes, the official research journal of the Percussive Arts Society. Additionally, he serves on the Education Committee and Ed Companion SubCommittee for PAS. Among the numerous awards and honors received throughout his career, the most current include the Ronald Dyer award for excellence in the area of percussion awarded by the University of Oklahoma in 2008 and participation in the semi-final round of the Southern California International Marimba Competition in 2009. Knight is a member of the Percussive Arts Society, College Music Society, TMEA, MMEA, and is an artist endorser for Vic Firth sticks and mallets and Yamaha percussion instruments. For more information about Dr. Knight please visit www.knightpercussion.com, or email joshknight2@gmail.com.