

Percussion Basics for Non-Percussionists

Stuff to bring to presentation:

- Copy question card
- Medium and Large binder clips
- Black towel
- Pencils
- Drum keys
- Conga wrench
- *Building Blocks for Beginning Band* sample books
- Laser pointer
- Projector, HDMI cable, and stand
- Snare drum and stand
- Ride cymbals
- Concert and drum set sticks
- Keyboard and timpani mallets

Welcome Card

Have someone collect the cards and tally the questions. Make a "Top 5 Questions" list while session is going on.

- What's are your top three topics in percussion that you would like to learn about today or in the future?
- We may not get to all of them, but if a common topic comes up often, I could make sure I talk about that one today, or add some to future sessions.

Introduction

Percussion History Bubbles

- This first bubble represents ALL history of Percussion. Everything that has actually happened in the percussion world. The next bubble represents what is written down. Note that it's smaller...
- The point is, it is impossible for someone who went to school for percussion to know it all, how do we expect someone who majored in a woodwind or brass instrument to know it all.
- You can spend years on this, I'm teaching this in an hour. West Chester University uses the first five to six weeks on snare drum in their non-pitched classes. Holding sticks, history, traditional vs matched, rudiments, stroke types, basic rhythms, sticking policies (natural vs alternating)

- We will get to through a ton of material today, I will keep things moving, but we may not get to it all. This is not a “Miracle Class”, but pretty darn close to it!

Question: What are the seven sub-families of percussion?

- Snare Drum/Rudimental
- Mallet/Keyboard
- Timpani
- Auxiliary
- Drum Set
- Hand Drums/World
- Steel Drums

Some instruments fall into numerous sub-families.

NOT Piano – a “machine” causes striking of the string

“Percussionists” vs “Drummers”

- I know of programs that only offer:
 - Snare and percussion only
 - Mallets first, then snare if you do well with mallets
 - Either snare or mallets
 - Snare and mallets at the same time
- In today’s world of percussion education, my personal belief is that students should learn to be well rounded percussionists. Therefore, I follow “Snare and Mallets at the same time.”
- Today there is a stronger understanding and consistent approach overall for percussionists. Drum corps, indoor drumline, and marching bands all teach a “total percussionist” approach. What you do on the field will easily translate to the concert stage. Drum lines played differently thirty years ago. Today technique is more relaxed and adaptable to more applications, especially in the front ensemble (the pit).
- Percussion education is one of the most progressive and rapidly growing venues of music education. At one point, outdoor percussion drove the industry, but now it is primarily due to indoor percussion.

- The “Well Rounded” approach – Ideas that work!
 - Move them around to different instruments
 - Create teams. A Team on mallets, B Team on percussion. Switch them at the next rehearsal.
 - Assign attainable excerpts and required scales and rudiments for each marking period.
 - Present it at the start of the year, this is the way we are going to do it. Kids will reach your expectations.
 - Some students may gravitate toward one or the other, and that’s ok! You never know what they will latch onto. I have had kids who didn’t like mallets in 6th grade, but that’s all they did in 12th grade.
 - Remember that the concepts on snare drum apply to mallet instruments as well. Stick control, rhythms, quality sound, etc.
 - Working on rhythm exercises? Play them on a mallet instrument instead of snare drum or drum pads. Assign each student one note of a major chord. Next rhythm, switch the students playing the 3rd down one half-step, and now you are teaching chord structure without that even being your goal. Try major, minor, 7th chords, diminished, etc.

Percussion Topics

Here are proposed presentation topics, based on the most common problems I see, questions that I receive, and attendees’ requests.

Which Way is Right?

- Always keep in mind that there is always more than one way to do something.
- There may be a better way to do it!
- Don’t get in a rut teaching it the same way because “That’s the way it’s always been done”, or “I learned it that way”.
- Keep it fresh! Keep what works, adjust or tweak what doesn’t.
- Keep in mind that I don’t know everything, and you may not agree with everything I say, and that’s OK.
- The point is, learn several ways. You may find or have already found what works best for you.

Topic #1 – Snare Drum

Set Up First:

- I always say to my students “Before you play, set up”

- Start with the snare stand

Stand Legs:

- Too close-no, it will fall over. I've seen it!
- Too low-no, the stand could bend at the bottom making the stand useless. I've seen it!
- 45-degree angle-yes! It won't tip over and you will have enough clearance.

Adjust Stand Height:

- Arms should be just about parallel to the floor.
- Higher will cause problems with sticks hitting the rims, and lower will cause sticks to strike the head at the wrong angle, resulting in a poor sound, or wrists won't turn correctly
- Wrists not turning correctly can cause problems with tendonitis or carpal tunnel syndrome.

Adjust the Angle of the Drum:

- In most circumstances, keep the drum flat.
- For traditional players, a common practice is to tilt it forward and to the right. I usually tilt the 2 o'clock position down 1-2 inches down.
- I commonly see concert snare drums angled toward the player. In my opinion, that is wrong because it automatically creates a bad angle in the wrists.
- When I was in high school, students liked to tilt their snares forward because they saw their favorite rock drummers do it. Today, very few players set their drums up that way.
- Think about it... if the wrists are already turned to the up position, how can you turn up from the wrist even more?

Snare Drum set-up tricks that I like to do.

- As soon as I get a drum, I move the head logo over the snare butt. When you get a drum out of the box usually the Remo/Evans logo is over the drum badge. Loosen the tension rods (no need to take them all the way out), shift the logo over.
- If the drum is in tune, place the snare drum in basket of snare stand so that the strainer/throw-off is facing your body. This trick enables the player to play over the snare wires at all of the zones.

- The “Zones” are:
 - Zone 1 Center of the head
 - Zone 2 Half way between center and logo
 - Zone 3 Just up to the logo. Going into or past the logo will not give player the correct snare response, or none at all.

Tuning A Snare Drum:

- Check the tuning of the heads, top head first, then bottom.
- There are several techniques and approaches to tuning drums.
- This is how I do it:

Top head:

- Tune lugs across from each other.
- Tune lugs side by side.
- Fine tune. Do the JJ Pipitone technique, play around the perimeter of the drum really fast, adjust the low spots.
- Tune with the snares ON as well. You will hear if the lugs are out of tune from the sympathetic vibrations of the snare wires.
- Note: There is always a fundamental and overtone of the head. Tune to the fundamental. Using the back end of the sticks help produce a better fundamental.

Bottom head:

- The bottom head can only receive so much tension. After a certain point, it just stretches more.
- I will often find that one or more bottom head tension rods have no tension at all or are missing.
- Some people tune the bottom head to a certain pitch to the top head.

Snare Wires:

- Too loose or too tight?
- Demonstrate how to tune a drum out of the box.
- Tune it from way too low to way to tight

Golden Rule: Turn off the snare wires during tacet sections

Favorite Snare Drums

- Pearl Philharmonic \$\$\$\$. Beautiful snare drum! Has cable, twisted wires, and Patterson cables (cable coated in plastic.) One throw off controls all three sets of snare wires all together, but you able to control the tension of each set of wires.
- Pearl Symphonic \$\$\$. I like this one a lot because it has three individual throw offs, enabling you to get 7 different snare drum sounds!
- Pearl Modern Utility \$. For a drum that costs \$100, this drum sounds amazing!

Topic #2 - Snare Drum Rolls

- I do not plan on talking about technique too much, but this one gets a lot of teachers.
- Difference between buzz and open.
- How to play a good buzz roll.
 - Bob's Buzzes
- Vary the roll speed.
- Proper stick position.
 - Check the angle of the sticks
 - What zone are you playing in? Rolls tend to sound better in zone 2

Topic #3 - Concert Bass Drum

Concert Bass Drum

- How to get the best sound. Concert bass drums tend to sound too Boomy, Tinty, Rattley, or Muffled
- What are the best dampening techniques?
 - There is the leg/kneed technique, however, I have yet to see a stand that has a working riser.
 - Muffle resonant head with opposite hand. Smaller kids can rarely attempt this.
 - Try the towel and binder clip approach. Works great, inexpensive and adjustable.
- Three zones like snare drum. Zone 1 is staccato, zone 2 is general playing, zone 3 is for rolls.

- Mallet suggestions.
 - Biggest problem with mallets is the felt wears away quickly.
 - A few companies sell replacement felt
 - Innovative are my favorite, Vic Firth are nice but wear out quicker
 - Good idea to have a trap table or mallet bag
- Head suggestions: Remo FibreSkyn II or Renaissance heads for all concert Bass Drums. These heads are a synthetic imitation of calfskin. They have a warm, rich sound with very little “ring,” yet are very durable and not affected by climate.
- I heard a long time ago that the Cavaliers always tunes their concert bass drum to C#. I tried it and it did sound good. Not sure why!

Wilson Publications Resources Menu

- I want to share some exciting additions to my website, Wilson Publications
- On this site, you will find a very useful *Resources* menu
- My goal was to make several pages useful to teachers and students
- *Brook Mays* was a company in Texas that was sued by *First Act Instruments* for using the phrase “Instrument Shaped Objects” on an advertisement. For that reason, since I own my own publishing company, I will not be telling you the brands to stay away from. I can, however tell you the brands and models I would buy. Keep in mind that I do my homework on product research, I am a geek for gear. I know what works and what doesn’t work, and I know who makes quality products.
- Today’s presentation is available for you all as well!
- And yes, you can access my products for purchase as well!
- I do have some free samples of my *Building Blocks for Beginning Band* if you are interested

Topic #4 – Drum Heads

- We already talked about how to tune a snare drum. Let’s go a little further into brands and models,
- How to tune other drums.
- Concert toms, diminished intervals. Chances are the diminished interval will not coincide with the key your wind players are playing.
- When to change them and how to do it properly
- If is not broken or ripped, it doesn’t mean it’s still good.
- Suggested brands/model to buy

- My friend told me the other week that he has 6 drums in his basement for him to change heads. Band directors are intimidated, so they hire him to do it.

Topic #5 - Sticks and Implements

- What's the difference between sticks?
- Will any stick do?
- Don't use sticks that look like they've gone through a war. They do not have resonance when they are broken and shredded. Some drummers think that it is cool to have shredded wheat sticks, like it is a medal of honor.
- Mallets that sound good on rosewood marimbas will not sound or feel the same on Kelon/synthetic bars, and vice versa. Material does not speak the same.
- Use mallets appropriate for the range of the instrument.
- What are my favorites?

Topic #6 - Drum Set

- How to properly set up a drum set
 - "Meat & Potatoes"/Practice/Teaching
 - Traditional Jazz
 - Standard 5 Piece
 - "Modern Bonham" Dave Grohl, Emmanuel Capplette, Jojo Meyer
 - Gone are the days of the giant 7 piece or larger drum sets
- High hat clutch is almost always wrong
- You should be able to touch every instrument from your seat
- Correct placement of drums and cymbals. Talk about height and angle
- Always have extra felts and washers, sleeves. Steve Weiss has packs of them. Doesn't cost a lot, but important.
- Different hardware options.

Topic #7 - Drum Set Cymbals

- What are the different kinds of cymbals?
 - High Hat 13"-15"
 - Ride 20"-22"
 - Crash 15"-19"
 - Splash 6"-12"
 - China 14"-22"
 - Effects. There are versions of china cymbals that don't look like China cymbals, Crash of Doom, Holey
- What the different cymbals are for
- How to properly set up a drum set cymbals.
- Logical and comfortable placement of drums and cymbals.
- Recommended brands and sizes.
- Always use a felt and a sleeve. Otherwise you will keyhole your cymbals.
- To clean or not to clean?

Topic #8 - Orchestral Cymbals

Orchestral Cymbals

- Most varied in teaching technique
- Identify different types of crash sounds.
- Not every crash has to be a loud crash
- Sound comes from the side of the cymbals, not the front. Unnecessary to "spray" cymbals for concert setting. In drum corps it's a visual thing, not a sound thing.
- German heavier, Viennese middle, French thinner. Middle-High School 17"-18" German or Viennese (16" for tiny kids, but you'll sacrifice in sound.) French are better for marches.
- Conductor says you need to see it to hear it. No good. Conductors don't always know that.
- Most varied in teaching technique. What pair should I buy for my students?

Topic #9 - Matched Grip vs Traditional Grip

- Discuss the various schools of thinking
- Coming from a person who strictly plays traditional grip, I never teach traditional
- Santa Clara did a few years with matched grip
- Students who are struggling to learning shouldn't have to learn two different grips.
- Doesn't serve a function.
- Several school of thinking. "It's always been done like this", "The drum corps do it"
- Percussionists do something because there was a reason to do it. Compensated to make it functional

Topic #10 - Timpani

- Oh my, do we even have the time? I could spend an entire session on this!
- Ranges of each drum, which to use. Middle school is middle two drums, set it and forget it.
- What the heck is that knob for? Is that how I tune my drums? Getting the tension correct in the range of the drum
- Buzz rolls on timpani are a no-no. Play single rolls 3" from the edge, and moving the mallets apart will give a nice open, warm roll.
- Muffling and muting. Would use on 32" for a staccato passage, more articulation, dryer sound. Fast passage. Also mutes for sympathetic vibrations
- Stravinsky owned his own set of drums and was able to play what he wrote. Many of today's contemporary composers say "let them figure it out".
- Gauges are a rough estimate
- Mallet selection.

Topic #11 - Rudiments

- Quick history of the rudiments.
- There are 40 International Rudiments (originally 26). Now there are almost 40 more "Hybrid Rudiments", which are a mixture of original rudiments or new creations.
- The average student does not need all these rudiments, so an overview of the most commonly used ones that help beginners.

- (refer to my list from *Conceptual Foundations for Drum Set*)

Topic #12 - Auxiliary Instruments

- How to hold and play each of the “toys” (triangle, tambourine, claves, etc.)
- Triangle – simple instrument, many ways to play it wrong. Always have a set of triangle beaters. Don’t use a wooden mallet!

Top Tips

- Know who the famous drummers are
- “Stuff to bring to every gig – “Drummer’s Emergency Bag”
 - Towels
 - Gaff tape
 - Large binder clips for towels
 - Medium binder clips for music stands. The golden music stand rule – clip even when you don’t think you need to clip!
 - Pencil
 - Metronome
 - Extra sticks – I have a pair of sticks with my spare tire!
- So many band directors are teaching tunes, not technique
- Teaching Scales – Demonstrate the use of “Bob’s Constellations”
- The sound you hear behind the instrument you are playing will not sound the same from behind the audience.
- Mallets. Learning your scales, learn your keys, learn to read
- For trips, always bring your own snare drum, cymbals, auxiliary instruments, and mallets/sticks. Never assume the place you are going will have quality or correct instruments for contest.
- Cymbal rolls at the edge at 3 and 9 o’clock. Louder rolls don’t need to be faster strokes. Just roll slower and apply more intensity.
- There may always more than one way to do something. There may be a better or newer way to do it. Don’t get in a rut teaching it the same way because “That’s the way it’s always been done”, or “I learned it that way”. Keep it fresh! Keep what works, adjust or tweak what doesn’t. The point is, learn several ways. You may find or have already found what works best for you.
- Practice with a Metronome: \$100 for a Dr. Beat, or \$0 for free apps. There’s just no excuse for not having one anymore



Picture Format

- Transparency 50%
- Angle 45°
- Distance 10
- Blur Radius 10

Synopsis

This session is geared toward music educators of all experience levels who either find themselves lost in the multi-faceted world of percussion instruction or want to gain insight into enriching their current percussion programs. Considering the innumerable aspects of the percussion world, it is virtually impossible for anyone to be an expert in all areas so teaching percussion can be overwhelming. I often see new teachers or teachers with little or no experience in percussion get lost in knowing what is correct...and I don't blame them! There is a long list of demands in percussion education!

As a professional percussionist and educator who has over thirty years of experience teaching across the spectrum from elementary beginners to college music majors, and from concert playing to jazz band and drum corps, I have been fortunate to see many amazing programs and performances. I have seen techniques and procedures that work, developed by some of the best percussion teachers in the country, and I have witnessed strategies that fail.

With this in mind, my goal is to demystify common percussion problems band directors encounter. I will provide straight-forward tips that the attendees can take with them and apply to their teaching the very next day! In addition to

presenting a “Top 10” list of common incorrect practices, I will share insights on mallet/stick selections, how to set-up or tune instruments, addressing technique challenges, knowing what equipment to use, when to use it, and more.