

Characteristic Sounds for Concert and Marching Percussion

Presented by

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Characteristic Sounds for Concert and Marching Percussion Clinic Outline

Concert Percussion

- I. Foster an Awareness of Tone Quality in Your Students
 - A. Percussion is an area where you can sound like the professionals with relative ease
 - B. Include issues of timbre in your instructions – “How does that sound?”
 - C. Use representative recordings as examples
 - D. Percussion instruments are important for their color – encourage your students to play out
- II. The Four Factors of Tone Production on Percussion Instruments
 - A. Properties of the instrument
 1. Use the best quality instrument you can afford
 2. Keep instrument in repair (and teach your students to do so)
 - a) Keep instruments covered – they are not tables
 - b) Be careful when moving large instruments
 3. Keep instrument properly tuned and/or adjusted (and teach your students to do so)
 - B. Properties of the beater
 1. Use beaters of appropriate density ($= \text{Mass} * \text{Volume}$)
 - a) Must be dense enough to get full tone
 - b) If the density of the beater is greater than the density of the instrument...
 2. Think of mallet ‘hardness’ primarily as a timbral consideration
 - C. Where the instrument is struck
 1. Be diligent with playing spots – this is the factor most significantly influenced by the player
 2. The center of just about anything is either a primary or secondary nodal point
 3. Think of playing spot primarily as a timbral consideration
 - D. How the instrument is struck
 1. Emphasize proper grip (embouchure)
 2. Emphasize proper stroke (breath support) – use natural rebound of instrument
 3. Direction of energy in stroke
 4. Velocity of stroke (as a function of stick height)
 5. Think of velocity/stick height as a dynamic consideration



III. The Concert Snare Drum

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Use drum of appropriate size – 6 1/2 x 14” is ideal
2. Tune top head (batter) to ‘feel’
3. Bottom (snare) to ‘pitch’
4. Use little to no external muffling (make a custom head with a built-in muffle ring)
5. Change heads at regular intervals, or when worn out or damaged (mark with Sharpie)
6. Cable or a combination of cable and wire snares are preferable

B. Properties of the beater

1. Use a concert snare drum stick (not drum set or marching) should have a rounded bead
2. Make sure sticks are in good condition

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. Use just off center as general playing spot – try to hit same spot with both sticks
2. Use edge for thinner tone (See II. C. 3) – NOT automatically for soft dynamics

D. How the instrument is struck (See II. D. 1 & 2)

E. Other Drums

1. Field Drum (12 x 14 or 15”)
 - a) Old marching drum tuned down
 - b) Use a bigger stick
2. Tenor Drum (like field drum without snares)
3. Concert Toms (set of four: 10” – 12” – 13” – 14”)
 - a) Use hard felt sticks
 - b) Can use marching or drum set toms re-tuned

IV. The Concert Bass Drum

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Use drum of appropriate size – 36” is ideal
2. Tune playing side (batter) as low as it will go without ‘flap’
3. Tune other side to ‘pitch’ – go for a low, resonant ‘boom’
4. Change heads at regular intervals, or when worn out or damaged (mark with Sharpie)
5. Do not muffle internally, use external device only when necessary
6. A suspended stand is nice

B. Properties of the beater

1. Use a dense enough mallet
2. Use a smaller pair for rolls

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. General – just off center
2. Thin sound – near edge
3. ‘Cannon shot’ – center (more contact sound, less resonance)

D. How the instrument is struck (See II. D. 1 & 2)

1. Use direct stroke
2. Use single stroke rolls – listen to natural sustain of the instrument to gauge roll speed
3. Check score, use ears for durations

V. Crash Cymbals

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Have a variety of sizes and weights
 - a) 18" medium (Viennese) for general use
 - b) 16" dark (German) for marches
2. Use quality leather straps only – learn (and teach your students) to tie a cymbal knot
3. Pads are unnecessary and they dampen high frequency overtones

B. How the instrument is struck

1. Check score, use ears for durations
2. Use a full crash at all dynamic levels (no 'tapping' for soft crashes)
3. Use a full crash even when 'choke' is indicated (no 'hi-hatting' unless indicated)
4. ODAFE (all factors increase as crashes get louder, and decrease as they get softer):
 - a) *Off*-center
 - b) *D*istance
 - c) *A*ngle
 - d) *F*lam
 - e) *E*nergy

VI. Suspended Cymbals

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Have a wide variety of sizes and weights
 - a) 18" medium-thin for general playing
 - b) Special effects
 - i. Hi-Hat
 - ii. Splash
 - iii. China
 - iv. Sizzle
2. Make sure stands are in good repair
 - a) Metal washer
 - b) Two felt washers
 - c) Post insulator
 - d) Wing nut
3. Use goose-neck stands (a boom or mini-boom stand will work)
 - a) Allows more vibration
 - b) Widens your cymbal selection to include crash cymbals

B. Properties of the beater

1. Use a medium yarn-wrapped mallet for general playing (rolls and crashes)
2. Don't use timpani mallets (even if the music asks for them)
3. Use a snare stick only when specifically called for
4. Use an orchestral brush when brushes are called for

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. The further out on the cymbal, the more overtones; closer to center, more fundamental
2. Roll (and crash) near the edge at three and nine o'clock

D. How the instrument is struck

1. Warm it up
2. For crashes and notes on the dome using a stick, hit with its shoulder
3. Use single stroke rolls – listen to natural sustain of the instrument to gauge roll speed
4. Check score, use ears for durations – learn how to control decay

VII. Tam-Tams and Gongs

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Tam-Tam usually called a Gong (technically, a gong has definite pitch)
2. 29" is a good size, plus a bigger one (34") if you can
3. Chinese made, hand-hammered bronze instruments are very nice

B. Properties of the beater

1. Use a dense enough mallet
2. Use a smaller pair for rolls

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. General – just off center
2. Thin sound – near edge

D. How the instrument is struck

1. Warm it up
2. Use direct stroke
3. Use single stroke rolls – listen to natural sustain of the instrument to gauge roll speed
4. Check score, use ears for durations – learn how to control decay

VIII. The Triangle

A. Properties of the instrument

1. 6" or larger
2. Should have a wealth of overtones, and long natural sustain/decay
3. Use an appropriate clip – string should not interfere with vibrations

B. Properties of the beater

1. "Speak softly, but carry a big stick" – beater should be dense enough to get a full tone
2. Have a variety of sizes in pairs

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. Hit on bottom side at 45° angle to the plane of the instrument (brings out overtones)
2. Roll in top corner, alternating from side to side

D. How the instrument is struck

1. Hold instrument up for projection, and sight line
2. Do not overplay – this is a very loud instrument (See VIII. B. 1)
3. Check score, use ears for durations – learn how to control decay
4. Suspend from stand, and use two beaters for rapid rhythms

IX. The Tambourine

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Must have a head – plastic is OK, skin is better
2. 10" diameter
3. Two rows of real metal jingles
4. Wood shell

B. Where the instrument is struck

1. Near the edge
2. Strive for a balance between sound of head and sound of jingles

C. How the instrument is struck

1. Hold instrument up for projection, and sight line
2. Take gravity into consideration
 - a) Sound quality
 - b) Transport instrument quietly
 - c) Preparation for changing techniques
3. Performance chart:

	<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>ff</i>
One hand rhythms:	one finger	add fingers	all fingers	flatten hand	knuckles	fist
Two hand rhythms:	two fingers	add fingers	all fingers	fist/knee		

3. Sustains

- a) Shake roll – longer durations, louder dynamics
- b) Thumb roll – shorter durations, softer dynamics

X. Castanets

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Wood is preferable to plastic
2. Paddle mounted
3. Stick mounted
4. Machine mounted

B. How the instrument is struck

1. Characteristic sound is a flam – double when you can
2. Play stick mounted castanets on your knee
3. Use fingers on both machine mounted castanets

XI. Wood Blocks and Temple Blocks

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Have a wide variety of sizes
2. In general, wood blocks should sound higher than temple blocks
3. Use wood blocks made from a single piece of wood
4. Temple blocks should be tuned (relatively) to a pentatonic scale

B. Properties of the beater

1. Use a hard rubber mallet
2. If the density of the beater is greater than the density of the instrument...

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. Play on 'sweet-spot' – edge over opening

D. How the instrument is struck

1. Hold instrument up for projection, and sight line – aim 'sweet-spot' at audience
2. Place on a padded stand and use two mallets for rapid rhythms
3. If you must use a stick, hit gently with the shoulder across the 'sweet-spot'

XII. Orchestra Bells/Glockenspiel

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Steel bars are preferable to aluminum
2. Professional quality instruments are not that big an investment – and it pays off!
3. Mind the transposition – sounds two octaves higher than written
4. Overtones are non-harmonic

B. Properties of the beater

1. General – hard plastic mallets, have a variety of densities
2. Marches, or when a particularly brilliant sound is desired – brass
3. Special effects – hard rubber
4. Mallets with a flexible handle (rattan or fiberglass) will give less contact sound

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. Just off center
 - a) In front on naturals
 - b) Behind on accidentals
2. Targets are too small to use the end of the bar

D. How the instrument is struck

1. Do not overplay – this is a very loud instrument
2. Choke-up on mallets for control in soft passages
3. Let it ring – rolls are seldom necessary, sometimes even if notated
4. Added octaves are often effective

XIII. Chimes

A. Properties of the instrument

1. 1 1/2” tubes are preferable to 1 1/4”
2. Check range – is top note an F or a G?
3. Overtones are non-harmonic

B. Properties of the beater

1. Use a rawhide or plastic hammer from hardware store, or one commercially available
2. Pad one side for softer attack

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. Play on lip at top of tube
2. Playing in the middle doesn't give characteristic sound, and may damage tube

D. How the instrument is struck

1. Use a stroke angled to activate the entire tube
2. Let it Ring – use pedal for sustain/clarity of line
3. Lock pedal open, and hand dampen when possible

XIV. The Xylophone

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Use an instrument with full size bars
2. Bars are made either of wood or a synthetic material (fiberglass derivative)
 - a) Wood bars give more professional sound
 - b) Synthetic bars are more durable
3. Mind the transposition – sounds one octave higher than written
4. Principal overtone sounds one-twelfth above fundamental

- B. Properties of the beater
 - 1. General – plastic, or very hard rubber mallets – sound should be brilliant and loud
 - 2. Special effects – hard rubber
 - 3. If the density of the beater is greater than the density of the instrument...
- C. Where the instrument is struck
 - 1. Just in front of center on naturals
 - 2. On the very edge (closest to player) on accidentals
- D. How the instrument is struck (See II. D. 1 & 2)
 - 1. Use single stroke rolls – roll speed will need to be rapid due to limited bar ring

XV. The Marimba

- A. Properties of the instrument
 - 1. Use an instrument with full size bars – try to get a 4 1/3 octave instrument (low A)
 - 2. Bars are made either of wood or a synthetic material (fiberglass derivative)
 - a) Wood bars give more professional sound
 - b) Synthetic bars are more durable
 - 3. Principal overtone sounds two octaves above fundamental
- B. Properties of the beater
 - 1. Wide variety of tone colors possible
 - a) Medium to hard rubber mallets in pairs or sets of four
 - b) Soft to hard yarn-wrapped mallets in pairs or sets of four
 - 2. Heavier mallets are more effective in ensemble settings
 - 3. If the density of the beater is greater than the density of the instrument...
 - 4. Non-flexible handles (birch) make mallets easier to control
- C. Where the instrument is struck
 - 1. Just in front of center on naturals
 - 2. On the very edge (closest to player) on accidentals
- D. How the instrument is struck (See III. D. 1 & 2)
 - 1. Use single stroke rolls – listen to natural sustain of the instrument to gauge roll speed
 - 2. Basic four-mallet technique is within the grasp of most high school and some middle school students
 - a) Burton technique
 - b) Stevens technique

XVI. The Vibraphone

- A. Properties of the instrument
 - 1. Use an instrument with full size bars
 - 2. Bars are made of aluminum
 - 3. Principal overtone sounds two octaves above fundamental
 - 4. Make sure motor and pedal are in good working order
 - 5. When not using motor, make sure resonators are in open position
- B. Properties of the beater
 - 1. Medium to hard chord wrapped mallets in pairs or sets of four
 - 2. Mallets with a flexible handle (rattan or fiberglass) will give less contact sound

C. Where the instrument is struck

1. Just off center

- a) In front on naturals
- b) Behind on accidentals

2. Use of the edge of the bar is made difficult because all the bars are on the same level

D. How the instrument is struck (See III. D. 1 & 2)

1. Learn to use pedaling and mallet dampening for clarity of line

2. Instrument has natural sustain – rolls are seldom necessary, sometimes even if notated

3. Vibists will learn alternate stickings to compensate for keyboard arrangement

(i.e. Eb Major Scale = LRRLRRL)

4. Basic four-mallet technique is within the grasp of most high school and some middle school students

- a) Burton technique

XVII. Timpani

A. Properties of the instrument

1. Make sure drums are tuned to proper fundamental pitch

- a) 32" – D
- b) 29" – F
- c) 26" – A or Bb
- d) 23" – D
- e) 20" – F or G

2. Make sure heads are "cleared"

- a) Bowl and counterhoop must be perfectly round
- b) Tension (and therefore pitch) must be the same at each point

3. Change heads at regular intervals, or when worn out or damaged (mark with Sharpie)

4. Keep main spring in adjustment (See XVII. A. 1)

- a) Turn counterclockwise, half turns at a time if pedal tends to stay toe down
- b) Turn clockwise, half turns at a time if pedal tends to stay heel down
- c) Use pedal tension adjustment to set resistance

5. Never move by grabbing counterhoop

B. Properties of the beater

1. Have a variety of mallets for a variety of tone colors

- a) Very soft (Cartwheel)
- b) General
- c) Hard
- d) Very hard
- e) Wood (use sparingly if at all)

2. Replace or re-cover when worn out

3. Mark seams

C. Where the instrument is struck (See III. D. 1 & 2)

1. General playing – 2-3" from edge, over pedal

2. Spread playing spots when rolling

D. How the instrument is struck

1. Use single stroke rolls – listen to natural sustain of the instrument to gauge roll speed

2. Check score, use ears for durations

3. Use dampening for clarity of line

Marching Percussion

I. Battery (use manufacturers “top-of-the-line”)

A. Snare Drums

1. Properties of the instrument

- a) 12 x 14, 12-lug with steel reinforcement ring
- b) Batter heads
 - i) Kevlar (FALAMS)
 - ii) Aramid (Black or White Max)
 - iii) Mylar
- c) Snare heads
 - i) Kevlar
 - ii) Mylar (crimped not glued)
- d) Tuning
 - i) Fit to program
 - ii) Batter head to “feel”
 - iii) Snare head to “pitch”
 - iv) “Tap out” snares – don’t over tighten
 - v) Sound reflectors

2. Properties of the beater

- a) Use sticks designed for marching snare drums
- b) Avoid concert or drum set sticks
- c) Special effects

3. Where the instrument is struck

- i) Center for general purpose
- ii) Near edge for special effects (thinner sound)

4. How the instrument is struck (See II. D. 1 & 2)

B. Tenors

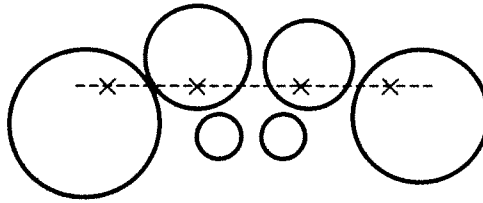
1. Properties of the instrument

- a) “Quads”
 - i) 8”-10”-12”-13”
 - ii) 10”-12”-13”-14”
- b) “Quints”
 - i) 6” (spock)-8”-10”-12”-13”
 - ii) 6” (spock)-10”-12”-13”-14”
- d) Heads (crimped not glued)
 - i) Pinstripe
 - ii) Emporer
 - iii) Other
- e) Tuning schemes (fit to program)
 - i) Bottom-up minor thirds, fourths or harmonic series model
 - ii) Top-down minor thirds, fourths or harmonic series model

2. Properties of the beater

- a) Plastic disc type
- b) Soft (puffies)
- c) Sticks for Latin effects

3. Where the instrument is struck
 - a) Near rims for maximum overtones and ergonomics
 - b) Straight-line system



4. How the instrument is struck (See II. D. 1 & 2)

C. Bass Drums

1. Properties of the instrument

- a) Configurations

- i) One drum – as large as player can carry
- ii) Two drums – add one drum 4" smaller (avoid "George of the Jungle" syndrome)
- iii) Three drums – 28" – 24" – 20"
- iv) Four drums – 28" – 24" – 20" – 16"
- v) Five drums – 28" – 24" – 20" – 18" – 16"
or 32" – 28" – 24" – 20" – 16"

- c) Heads – smooth white plastic, crimped not glued

- d) Muffling

- i) Internal (glued to shell)
- ii) External (glued to head)
- iii) Built-in (Power Max)

- e) Tuning schemes (match to program)

- i) Tune bottom (anchor) drum to lowest pitch with tone
- ii) Bottom-up minor thirds
- iii) Bottom-up fourths
- iv) Bottom-up harmonic series model

2. Properties of the beater

- a) Use mallets designed for outdoor performance
- b) Match size of mallet to size of drum
- c) Hard felt
- d) Soft (puffies)
- e) Special effects

3. Where the instrument is struck – just off center (watch like a hawk!)

4. How the instrument is struck (See II. D. 1 & 2)

D. Cymbals (if using on field)

1. Properties of the instrument

- a) Sizes (have a variety of sizes and weights for a broad tonal spectrum)
 - i) 16" – small sound, only use if necessary
 - ii) 18" – general playing
 - iii) 20" – big sound, use if someone can handle them
- b) Use quality leather straps only
- c) Learn (and teach your students) to tie a cymbal knot
- d) Pads are unnecessary and they dampen high frequency overtones
- e) Use split parts if possible

2. How the instrument is struck

- a) Use a marching cymbal grip
- b) Playing techniques are otherwise as those for concert (See V. B. 4)
- c) Be mindful of visual aspects

II. Front Ensemble (pit)

A. Keyboards

1. Properties of the instrument

- a) Balance wood and metal sounds
- b) Try for marimba/vibe dominant sound
- c) Use xylophone and bells as accent colors
- d) Add suspended cymbals to marimba and vibes
- e) Bells and xylo can double on crash cymbals
- f) Amplification

2. Properties of beater (use mallets designed for outdoor performance)

3. Where and how instrument is struck

- a) Playing techniques are as those for concert percussion
- b) Face and *perform* to audience!

B. Rack System (Pyle Percussion or home-made)

1. Properties of the instrument

- a) Use a wide variety of percussion to enhance your program
- b) Cymbals, Cymbals, CYMBALS (especially if not in battery)
- c) Bass/impact drums and tam tams in stereo if possible

2. Properties of beater (use mallets designed for outdoor performance)

3. Where and how instrument is struck

- a) Playing techniques are as those for concert percussion
- b) Face and *perform* to audience!

C. Timpani

1. Only use if:

- i) Integral to program
- ii) You have drums especially for marching band
- iii) You have a student who plays them well

2. Playing techniques are as those for concert percussion

3. Face and *perform* to audience!

D. Set-up schemes

- a) Keyboard choir
- b) Antiphonal
- c) Wood vs. Metal
- d) Timpani-in-the-middle
- e) Multi percussion “pods”
- f) Pit-on-the-field (be very, *very* careful)
- g) Face and *perform* to audience!



Resources

Black Swamp Percussion

(Professional quality snare drums, mallets,
and accessory instruments)
(616) 738-3190
www.blackswamp.com

The Cleveland Drum Company

(Professional quality timpani and snare drums)
(800) 321-0556
www.clevelanddrum.com

Frank Epstein Percussion

(Professional quality castanets and accessories)
www.members.aol.com/franksperc/

Evans Drum Heads

www.evansdrumheads.com

Fall Creek Marimbas

(Professional quality keyboard
percussion instruments)
(585) 554-4011
www.marimbas.com

Vic Firth Inc.

(Sticks and mallets)
(781) 326-3455
www.vicfirth.com

Grover Pro Percussion

(Professional quality snare drums, mallets,
and accessory instruments)
(781) 935-6200
www.groverpro.com/defaulttext.htm

Innovative Percussion

(Sticks and mallets)
(615) 333-9388
www.innovativepercussion.com

Latin Percussion

(973) 478-6903
www.lpmusic.com

Ludwig/Musser Percussion

www.ludwig-drums.com

Malletech Keyboard Mallets and Instruments

(732) 774-0011
www.mostlymarimba.com

Pearl/Adams Percussion

www.pearldrums.com

Pyle Percussion

www.pylepercussion.com

Remo Drum Heads

(661) 294-5600
www.remo.com

Sabian Cymbals

www.sabian.com

Yamaha Percussion

www.yamaha.com/DRUM.HTM

Zildjian Cymbals

www.zildjian.com

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World Wide Web

Bands of America: www.bands.org/

Blast!: www.blasttheshow.com/

Drop6 Media: www.drop6.com/

Drum Corps International: www.dci.org

Go Fish Music: www.gofishmusic.com/

Gridit!: <http://members.aol.com/gridit>

Richard Jones, The Well Tempered Timpani: <http://music.nebrwesleyan.edu/wtt/index.html>

The Percussive Arts Society: www.pas.org

Row-Loff Productions: www.rowloff.com/

Tap Space Publications: www.tapSPACE.com/index2.html

Winter Guard International: www.wgi.org



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