

What I Wish I Remembered from Percussion Techniques: A Refresher Course

Dr. Karlyn Vina
kvina@fiu.edu

Timpani

(See attached article: “7 Things Band Directors Should Know about Timpani”)

Sizes

- expressed as diameter, in inches
- standard set of 4 timpani: 32”, 29”, 26”, 23”
- we use the size as a name for each drum (for example, “tune an ‘A’ on the 29”)
- also important to know the sizes with reference to range, and when ordering heads (head sizes are larger than bowl sizes - always double-check with a trusted percussionist, manufacturer, or retailer).

Ranges

- you need to know the ranges to be able to help students with tuning schemes (what goes where?)
- you also need to make sure to maintain drums in the proper ranges so that you get all necessary pitches, and so that the pedals work properly

Grip and Stroke

- French grip (thumbs up) to facilitate LIFT (Why?)
- Stroke - lift each mallet immediately after striking

Beating Spot

- ~1/3 radius of the drum

Protecting your timpani

- Always cover timpani when not in use
- NOTHING GOES ON TOP!

Moving timpani

- Always move timpani by the struts, NEVER push, pull, or lift from the rim
- Set pedals to highest position before moving

Protecting timpani (and bass drum) mallets

- Nothing touches the mallet except for the drum head!
- Store in original bag, or plastic sandwich bag

Snare Drum

Grip

- Thumbs on the side of the sticks
- Fingers wrapped around (pointer finger AND pinky/ring finger)
- Backs of hands facing up
- Matched grip recommended for all concert percussion

Set-up of snare drum

- Snare strainer close to player
- Playing area is over snare bed
- MUFFLING! Can buy manufactured snare drum mute, or fabric/binder clip (I prefer a heavier fabric like glasses cleaner, or leather)
- Height of snare drum

Beating spots

- Changing beating spots for dynamic changes is very common in concert snare drumming (F is just off center, P is closer to edge - both always over snare bed)

Snare drum rolls

- Buzz (multiple bounce, closed) rolls VS. Double-stroke (open) rolls
- Determining Roll Base (rhythm of roll)
- Naming roll lengths: 5-stroke roll, 9-stroke roll, etc.
($2z + 1 = x$)

“Complementary Percussion” (Accessories)

Triangle

- Equipment: triangle, clip, beaters
- Respect the instrument!!! Your triangle player is important!!!
- How to hold the clip (resting on thumb and middle finger, with back fingers available for muffling)
- Beating Spot
- Angle
- Rolls

Tambourine

- Good quality, headed tambourine

- Holding the tambourine
- Angle of playing (45 degrees)
- Beaters: duck beak, fist, finger(s), palm
- Types of rolls: shake, finger/thumb
- How to play fast and loud?
- How to play fast and soft?

Cymbals

- Grip (NOT through the strap, touch the cymbals as little as possible)
- AVOID AIR POCKETS: 1) Angle and 2) Displacement
- Muffling (short crashes)

Bass Drum

- Beating spot – usually slightly off center (center for “canon” effect)
- Muffling – right knee, left hand, towel on bass drum??
- Protect the beaters!!!

Keyboard Percussion

Instrument Identification/Mallet Selection

- Glockenspiel/Orchestra Bells: hard plastic, brass
- Xylophone: medium to medium-hard plastic (hard rubber to soft plastic for practice/solo playing)
- Marimba: yarn
- Vibraphone: cord (more articulate than yarn)
- Chimes (tubular bells): double-sided hammer (plastic/felt), rawhide

How to Help Students Improve Reading Skills

- Make them do it!!! (Make sure to rotate part assignments)
- Reading drills: reading practice, flashcards, Speed Note Reading Tutor (vicfirth.com) → help students identify notes
- Technical drills: scales, arpeggios, technical exercises → help students find notes on keyboard faster
- Music stand placement
- Cover labeled notes on bell kits with tape
- Don't let them write in note names!!!!!!