



# YAMAHA

## Educator Series

PERCUSSION



*Nebojsa Jovan Zivkovic*

*Zivkovic completed his master's degrees in composition, music theory and percussion in Mannheim and Stuttgart, Germany. He tours extensively throughout Europe and performs frequently in the United States, Japan, Taiwan, Korea and recently in Mexico. He has also made a number of TV appearances and radio recordings in Germany and abroad. His creative output is captured on four compact discs of marimba and percussion and one CD with Darius Milhaus's marimba/vibraphone concerto recorded with the Austrian Chamber Symphony in Vienna. With over 50 published compositions, including several marimba and percussion concertos, Zivkovic is one of the best known composers.*

*Zivkovic's marimba is a one-of-the-kind instrument, made especially for him by Yamaha (YM-6000NJZ). Zivkovic also endorses Zildjian cymbals and his own line of Power-Mallets made by ABC-Holland. For more information on his current projects, please visit: [www.zivkovic.de](http://www.zivkovic.de)*

## General Principles of Mallet Technique:

### Shifting, Accuracy & Power Strokes

*By Nebojsa Jovan Zivkovic*

In recent years, the demand on the keyboard percussionist has increased enormously, not only in solo literature, but also in ensemble settings. Often, even a younger mallet player is required to perform parts with 4 mallets. Therefore, it is important to have a powerful and controlled stroke and the ability to hit the correct notes. The following exercises will give you a sense of my power-control-accuracy concept.

#### Instrument Height

My "recipe" for determining a proper playing height is as follows: take one mallet in each hand; when the angle of your upper-arm and elbow is slightly OVER 90°, when your hand wrist (hand back) is EVEN with your forearm, and when the mallet you are holding is a straight extension of your forearm, then the natural bars should be about 2 inches below the mallet head. Make sure to use blocks, or simply adjust a height of the instrument before you start playing.

#### Movement

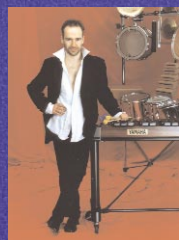
Movement is another important issue; do not move more than necessary, and do not constantly walk left and right behind the instrument. Arm and upper torso movement, with some body shifting are generally enough to cover most of the keyboard. Steps (walking) are of course necessary, but this should be minimized.

#### Mallet Choice

Mallet choice is another very important issue. Be aware that not only the hardness, but also the weight of the mallet head influences the projection of your sound and its fundamental tone. To really get a full sound and required dynamic level from your instrument, use slightly heavier mallets; around 38-46 grams per mallet. Try slightly more larger and harder heads than you would normally use. This will also help you to remain relaxed while performing, since you will not necessarily try to compensate for the softness of the mallet by beating harder on the keyboard. This will make it easier for you to get a softer sound in piano passages as well.

#### Accuracy and Power Strokes

Controlling a single stroke while holding 4 mallets can be a difficult task. The unused mallet should not move much while the other strikes. The ability to hit strongly without going too high with your arm is another very useful technique. "Power-kick" can be described as sudden strong twisting of the wrist while the mallet shaft is held tightly. This means that even the smallest motion of the hand is distributed straight to the mallet head without being "softened" at the connection point, mallet shaft and fingers. Hands should be low over the keyboard with the arms barely moving.



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It is like knocking on a door very strongly by holding a hand two inches away and not moving your forearm. I have selected several exercises from my mallet technique book, which you may find useful for improving the techniques mentioned above. Of course, along with these, you should also pick up some pieces for marimba, vibes or xylophone that deal with one or more of these technique issues. I recommend checking out my books Funny Marimba 1 or Funny Vibraphone 2. Both of these European best sellers contain ten solo pieces for 4 mallets ranging from the beginner to intermediate level.

### EXERCISES

The following exercises will help you develop these techniques. They are mostly targeting two or more technical problems at once. Some are also very suitable for the concert artist when only a limited time is available to warm up. Each exercise works only ONE mallet at a time, but you should however, hold 4 mallets when playing them. Transpose all exercises to each of the twelve keys. The mallets are numbered 1-2-3-4 from left to right. Exercises 1 to 3 develop control of mallets 2 (inside left hand) and 4 (outside right hand). Make sure to start out slow, then speed up with controlled motion. Think of "power-kicks" and let the unused mallet hang freely while the performing mallet is tight, strong and accurate. Note that you are practicing three different motions of the mallet: a jumping zigzag, a smoothly curved line and a triple stroke in a vertical motion. You will also notice how tricky it is to switch unused mallets on and off for only one single stroke on the beginning of each exercise. REMEMBER TO PLAY THE LEFT HAND.

Ex. 1

Musical notation for Exercise 1 with mallet numbers: R.H. 3 4 4 4, L.H. 1 2 2 2

Ex. 2

Musical notation for Exercise 2 with mallet numbers: R.H. 3 4 4 4 4 4 4, L.H. 1 2 2 2 2 2 2

Ex. 3

Musical notation for Exercise 3 with mallet numbers: R.H. 3 4 4 4 4 etc., L.H. 1 2 2 2 2 etc.

Here we have similar exercises, this time working on mallets 1 (outside left hand) and 3 (inside right hand). Transpose them to all 12 keys, and keep the strong and controlled "power-kick".

Ex. 4

Musical notation for Exercise 4 with mallet numbers: R.H. 4 3 3 3 etc., L.H. 2 1 1 1 etc.

Ex. 5

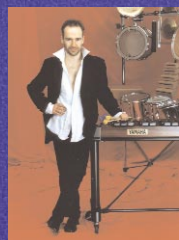
Musical notation for Exercise 5 with mallet numbers: R.H. 4 3 3 3 3 etc., L.H. 2 1 1 1 1 etc.

Ex. 6

Musical notation for Exercise 6 with mallet numbers: R.H. 4 3 3 3 3 etc., L.H. 2 1 1 1 1 etc.

Make sure to strike all notes correctly, and be sure to feel that each mallet is under control. Do not underestimate these exercises; they do have very useful applications in a real performance situation. The following is "NJZ-ALL-IN" exercise, which is one of my favorites. It contains single independent, alternating, and double vertical strokes! Practice each hand separately and transpose it. Keep at a forte level so you practice endurance and power at the same time. Start slow and speed up to quarter note = 112. Good luck with this one.





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Ex. 7 "NJZ-ALL-IN"

The musical notation for Exercise 7 consists of three staves. The first staff contains a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff begins with a measure marked '4' and contains several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above the notes). The third staff begins with a measure marked '7' and also contains triplet markings. The exercise involves changing intervals and using double vertical strokes.

Let us stay for a moment with each hand separately, but use double vertical strokes and changing intervals. The exercise below contains a 5 to 3 change. You should also practice it by replacing the fifth with the octave and by replacing the third with the octave. The rhythm was chosen to always allow you one 16th note break before changing the interval. Play the left hand an octave lower. Start slow and be precise in both notes and Rhythm. Speed up to quarter note = 120.

Ex.8

The musical notation for Exercise 8 is a single staff of music. It shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a cross-switching instruction (indicated by a slash and a vertical line) after the second measure. The exercise involves replacing the fifth with the octave.

When you became familiar with this pattern, you may want to go a step further and play it with both hands. Suddenly cross-switching the rhythm after the 2nd measure is good brain exercises too. In this one, you also may try to replace the fifth with the octave.

Ex.9

The musical notation for Exercise 9 consists of two systems, each with two staves. The first system shows a complex rhythmic pattern in the upper staff and a corresponding pattern in the lower staff. The second system continues the exercise with similar patterns. The exercise involves controlled power and sensitivity.

I hope after a couple of weeks of daily practice you will feel how helpful these short but tricky exercises are for your chops and your ability to control each of your 4 mallets. They will not only provide you with the necessary sensitivity but also with controlled power when needed.

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