

Percussion Primer / Triangle by Neil Grover

SELECTION

The triangle should be the highest, non-pitched member of the percussion family. Sizes range from 4" to 10", however, the best size for concert playing is between 6" and 9". A larger triangle provides a bigger internal working area for easier execution, however, it is heavier and more difficult to control. Triangles are made from steel, brass or bronze, each producing a different sonority.

SUSPENSION

A triangle needs to be suspended so that it vibrates unencumbered and freely, allowing maximum overtone resonance to be produced. It is very important that the instrument be suspended using a very thin, yet strong, mono-filament line. Fishing line works great and is also inexpensive. The use of string, cable, shoelaces, etc. will effectively dampen the resonance of any triangle. Using a second "catch line" will prevent the triangle from falling to the floor, should the primary line break. A light "triangle clip" will allow the triangle to be mounted on a music stand when not in use.

STROKE

The triangle should never be played when mounted on a music stand. It should always be held at eye level and struck on the bottom leg with a motion that "pushes away" the bottom leg. This method will produce the maximum overtone sonority. A triangle sound full of overtones will blend with other instruments. Remember, a triangle is a non-pitched instrument and should have a very lush array of overtones, it should not sound like a bell!

BEATERS

Beaters are available in a large variety of sizes (diameters), materials and shapes. For general playing, a set of at least three steel beaters in various diameters and a length of 8-9" is recommended. Various size beaters will produce different sonorities. As in all percussion instruments, a smaller beater produces a thinner sound while a heavier beater creates a big sonority. Generally speaking, thinner beaters are used when playing at softer dynamic levels.

Percussion Primer / Tambourine

by Neil Grover

SELECTION

The tambourine is available in many sizes and jingle configurations. Most importantly, for concert playing, a tambourine with a quality skin head is essential! Headless "rock" tambourines are not a viable substitute. I suggest a general purpose 10" diameter quality tambourine with a double row of bright sounding jingles. Of course it is always beneficial to have a few instruments with a range of sound characteristics available.

GRIP

Hold the tambourine with a firm, yet flexible grip. Remember, the instrument needs to vibrate when struck. Right handed players should hold the tambourine in the left hand and strike with the right. Maximum clarity and articulation is achieved by holding the tambourine parallel to the floor. Maximum jingle resonance is achieved by holding the tambourine vertically. For general playing, the tambourine should be held at a 45 degree angle.

STROKE

Three fingers = general playing (pp-mf).

Four fingers = strong playing (f).

Closed fist = very aggressive playing (ff-ffff).

Rolls = played by shaking with grip hand or using thumb (friction) roll.

EXTRA SOUND

The tambourine can easily produce unwanted sounds if not handled with care. Be careful not to create unnecessary jingle sound when handling the tambourine during performance!

Percussion Primer / Cymbals

by Neil Grover

SELECTION

Cymbals are instruments of great coloristic expression. While they can add a brilliance of sound unlike any other instrument, they must be played with care and musicality. It is imperative that cymbals be chosen for sound and manageability. For younger students, a pair of 17" medium-light cymbals is recommended. For high school players, addition of medium 19" cymbals is appropriate. For maximum resonance only soft leather straps should be used! The addition of leather pads can also aid in cymbal handling. Wooden handles or soft "furry" pads are not acceptable in the concert hall!

GRIP

Cymbals should be held in a relaxed, yet controllable manner. The wrists should never be inserted through the strap, rather, the strap should be held between the thumb and pointer finger, with the other fingers supporting the pointer. Imagine turning a key in a car door, ending with the thumb on top. This is exactly the way the cymbal strap is held.

STROKE

Hold both cymbals together with the top edge at eye level. Slowly separate the cymbals, keeping them closer for soft crashes and farther apart for loud crashes. Using a flam motion bring the cymbals together and instantly pull them apart. Very soft crashes are played by lightly "scraping" the cymbals together. Many student have trouble playing soft crashes and resort to touching the edges at a perpendicular angle. This is not acceptable!

MUFFLING

Cymbals commonly have to be muffled, especially for short accent notes. This is accomplished by bringing the cymbals into the chest area after striking together.

Percussion Primer / Bass Drum

by Neil Grover

TUNING

The bass drum is the lowest sounding, non-pitched member of the drum family. It should sound noticeably lower than any other instrument. Think of it as a non-pitched extension of the timpani. Tune the resonating (ringing) head slightly higher than batter (striking) head. Check for loose tension rods and any other “rattles”.

PLAYING AREA

General - half way between edge and center.
Staccato - in center.
Legato - near edge.

STROKE

Pull sound out of drum! Use wrist AND arm motion with upstroke. Marches use short strokes near center using mainly wrist. Rolls use 2 mallets spread apart rolling slowly using wrist only!

MUFFLING

Use the right knee and left hand. For very short strokes leave knee on head while striking. (Lefties use left knee/right hand). Do not dampen the concert bass drum with tape on the head, or any muffling item placed inside the shell. Remember, the concert bass drum should sound very low and resonant!

INSTRUMENT SIZE

Bass drums are available in many different sizes. It is important to choose a drum that is proportionally suitable for the player. For younger students, a 28" diameter drum is suitable. For older players, a 32"–36" diameter drum works best.