



YAMAHA

Educator Series

PERCUSSION



Anthony Cirone

Anthony J. Cirone received his bachelor's and master's of science degrees from the Julliard School of Music where he studied with timpani legend Saul Goodman. In addition to his long tenure as a member of the San Francisco Symphony, he served as professor of music at San Jose State University from 1965 to 2001, and has been on the faculties of San Francisco State University and Stanford University. Mr. Cirone is currently professor of music and chairman of the percussion department at Indiana University at Bloomington. As a composer, he has published over seventy titles including textbooks, three symphonies for percussion, four sonatas, seven works for orchestra and a string quartet. Anthony J. Cirone is a Yamaha performing artist and clinician.

Concert Snare Drum

The Fundamentals of Musicianship

By Anthony Cirone

What could be more challenging to a percussionist than extracting the greatest amount of music from an instrument that supplies the least amount of possibilities? This challenge is presented to every concert snare drummer. The snare drum lacks most of the characteristics musicians look for when attempting to play musically. Basically, it has one sound and is very staccato – both undesirable elements when performing in a musical manner. After considering these limitations, let's look at what is available to the performer:

(1) Rhythm, (2) Dynamics, (3) Tempo, (4) Phrasing and (5) Interpretation.

Although these musical elements are available to every instrumentalist, snare drummers ignore many of them in order to concentrate on the snare drum's most obvious element – rhythm. Musicians, however, can improve their performances by properly utilizing these elements as outlined below:

Rhythm

Once we have properly placed the rhythms, our next concern should be focused on their accuracy. Rhythms should not be rushed, dragged, or interpreted in such a way as to be inconsistent with musical style or ensemble. Rhythm is very important and deserves our primary attention. When this element of music has been taken care of, we can then focus on other, equally important, areas of performance.

Dynamics

Performers are constantly involved with interpreting dynamics because they are not always played at the same level. Many factors enter into a decision on how loud a forte marking should be played; for example: (a) The size of the ensemble; (b) The size of the hall; (c) Whether a performance is indoors or outdoors; (d) Whether the stage has a shell or not; (e) The quality of the instruments being used; (f) Balancing the dynamic level with other performers; and (g) Being flexible to the conductor's indications.

Tempo

Tempo is closely aligned to rhythm; however, it takes on another very important area of musicianship – the ability to follow the conductor. A performer may be playing accurately and with the correct dynamic, but if the conductor's tempo indications cannot be followed, a major problem will exist. During the course of a performance, the conductor may make tempo changes (whether they have been rehearsed or not). It is the performer's responsibility to maintain eye contact with the conductor and to be flexible enough to adjust the tempo at any given time. Tempo is critical with regard to solo playing because it cannot vary haphazardly within the work. There is an enormous difference between adjusting tempo for musical reasons and just plain rushing or dragging.



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Phrasing

Since much of the music written for percussion instruments is not phrased, the musical element of phrasing is a major consideration for percussionists. Phrasing is the composer's responsibility; but, for many reasons, some composers do not feel the necessity of adding phrase markings to the percussion parts. Whether these markings are present or not, music played by percussion instruments must be phrased in the same manner used by any instrumentalist. When a percussion part does not have indicated markings, the performer must listen carefully to other instrumentalists to determine the proper phrasing. Another concern is the ability to interpret phrase markings. Since the musical elements for snare drum are limited, the only method we have for phrasing is the use of accents, staccato marks and dynamics. Although other instrumentalists phrase with longer or shorter sounds, this is not available to a snare drummer. Two types of accents are available for phrasing. The first is the written accent, which is played noticeably louder than an unaccented note. The second is the phrase accent, which is a subtler accent and should not be as loud as the written accent.

Interpretation

The final element is interpretation. This is the most difficult element to teach since a person's interpretation is basically his or her own opinion. As long as the elements of music are not compromised, an individual's own interpretation is valid for solo works. A very important consideration in interpreting orchestral music is that it is the conductor's responsibility to instruct the performers on how to interpret the music. Performers must be flexible enough to interpret the music according to the conductor's wishes. It is also necessary for a soloist to create an interpretation of the music by analyzing its form and deciding what the composer originally intended. Then, using the elements previously discussed, construct a masterful performance.

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