

Developing the Total Percussionist

Tempo October 21/2011

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We are percussionists, not drummers. A percussionist plays everything *including* the drums whereas the term drummer often denotes only playing drums.

“the more they play, the less they’ll misbehave” -- Serrano, 2006

Organization

Make it easy for percussionists to find their instruments and put their music in order

Rehearsal Order

- Less stress for the percussion section because they know what to expect
 - the section can then plan for what they need in advance and have all equipment ready and laid out in appropriate places/sequences?

Have a base set up

****No matter what the set up is, make sure students know that they should be able to see you, the music and the instrument****

- Set ups are flexible, find one that works for you and makes sense for the student learning and the repertoire

Suggestion 1: Integrated on to the end of the rows --- mallets first 2 rows, SD BD third row, Timpani back row

- Puts the instruments with their pitch range partners within the band
- Brings the students closer
- Drawbacks: what do you do when you have multiple instruments on a part that are part of different rows; moving between pieces can take more time because you may have to weave between pieces

Suggestion 2: along the back row (Left to Right) mallets, aux, cym, SD, BD, Timpani

- No weaving when changing pieces when students change instruments between pieces
- The section goes from highest to lowest sounds
- All players have easy access to all of the instruments
- Drawbacks: students really need to learn to listen because of balance as they are listening to everything in front of them and hear a lot of low brass from the back row; students are farther away from you

Storage of Instruments

- Cabinets/Drawers
 - Keep things safe and organized for the students so that they know where the instruments are and where they should be putting them back. Labels are also a good idea, students then know exactly where things should go

- Students should be held accountable for instrument care. They are responsible for their instruments that means putting them away at the end of the day
- This also can apply to mallets. Mallets should be stored by type if possible usually in drawers or in cylindrical containers. Students should avoid pulling at the strings or fuzz on the mallets it will cause them to wear out faster.
- Students may also have stick bags to keep mallets that are assigned to them in so that they are responsible for them both in class and for private practice which is the same for any other instrument given to a student to use

Trap tables

- Keep the instruments at the level where they can change them and not lose sight of the conductor and make quick switches easily
- Cloth on stands help to eliminate unwanted sounds when picking up or putting down instruments

Part Assignments

- Distribution of parts should be even so that all students have a chance to play all of the instruments
- Parts should be clearly marked indicating what instruments are being played by what students because one student may be playing many instruments on the same part OR the part may be split between multiple students

Playing Musically

- Playing musically requires control of your instrument
- Control helps with dynamics and shaping the music
- Percussion is not just about rhythms that appear in the pieces of music
 - How do you play snare drum legato? It greatly depends on the dynamics and the attention played to the attack of the stick.

Tone and Technique

- Grip is like our embouchure, incorrect grip can cause injury, poor tone and a lack of control
- The metronome is a percussionists friend. The metronome helps percussionists work on subdivisions and learn to keep a steady beat.
- The “right” place to hit the drum of mallet instrument
 - SD the top half of the drum over the snare
 - Mallets ideally just off the centre of the key and not where the nodes (where the string goes through the mallet that suspends the bars) are

Snare Drum -things to check

- 1) Pointer fingers
- 2) Are the tips of the sticks close together and a triangle present?
- 3) Is your percussionist using unnecessary movement?
 - Less movement/smaller movement helps with playing faster

4) Are the sticks returning to starting position (one fluid motion)?

5) Is the drum the right height for the player?

Mallet Percussion

- Mallet choices

- Teach your students to read the mallet specifications on the piece and if you want them to change something tell them why. Help the students to listen so that they can make their own choices and think about the sound that they are producing

- Mallet players may need to move in order to center and maintain balance at the instrument because the instruments are quite long. It can be thought of as gliding and a smooth motion

Rudiments and Note Reading

Rudiments

- Have practice pads available at ALL times. If you are working with another section give your percussionists something to work on using the practice pads

- Knowing rudiments gives students access to a variety of sticking patterns that come naturally after some practice

- Integration can be in rhythm activities requiring specific stickings from your students, finding appropriate places in repertoire to specify stickings that they can do for a rehearsal

Note Reading

- Get your students on the instrument, get them playing, the more they play the more confident, relaxed, fluent and musical they will become, reducing mistakes made. Learning mallets later just makes the anxiety of mistakes worse

- Note knowledge allows percussionists to participate in discussions involving pitched elements such as melody and harmony

- Get your percussionists on the instrument participating in warm ups

- Echo patterns, melody play backs

- Have them play flute or oboe parts when working with that section

- Encourage them if they cannot play all of the notes to hit the first one in every bar

- Select notes that the student needs to recognize in the piece and have them play those ones as you start to build the vocabulary of the instrument and the way the notes are laid out

- If working on long tones have students start learning to roll --evenness of hands, adding resonance until the tone is done (every hit adds resonance)

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