

Keyboard FUNdamentals

Giff Howarth & Scott Herring



A Relaxed, Musical Approach to Mallets

The Grip Checklist:

- wrist flat
- thumb and index forming *fulcrum*
- all fingers in contact with mallet shaft
- be careful of “death grip” or heavy squeeze on mallet

The Stroke Checklist:

- *bounce the ball*
- wrist is main hinge (minimal vertical arm motion)
- FLUID upstroke into downstroke (bar just gets in the way)
- aim for next note at the peak of the arch

Posture Checklist:

- instrument at proper height
- stand with body approximately 3-5 inches from the instruments
- back straight
- head up, not “hunched over”
- feet approximately shoulder width apart

Mallet Pathways Checklist:

- “Arch or Rainbow” path
- aim for the next note from the peak of the arch
- think about the muscle memory from an interval standpoint

Traveling Around the Instrument Checklist:

- wrist should move the mallets up and down
- arms should move the mallets side to side
- make as few large movements as possible
- when moving large distances, avoid crossing the feet

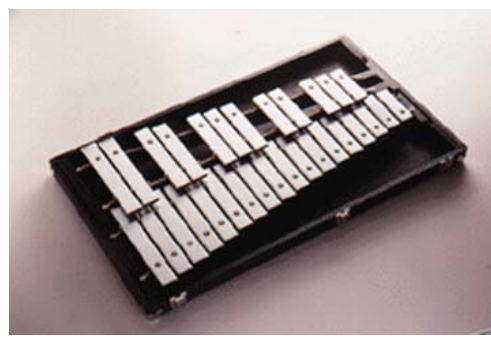
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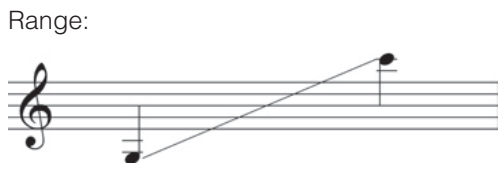


The Instruments of the Keyboard Percussion Family

Glockenspiel (Orchestra Bells)



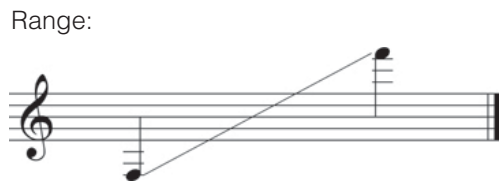
Bar Construction: Steel or Aluminum
Mallets: Plastic to Brass
Transposition (sounds): 2 Octaves Higher



Vibraphone



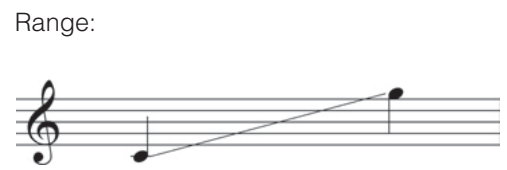
Bar Construction: Aluminum
Mallets: Soft Yarn to Med. Rubber



Chimes



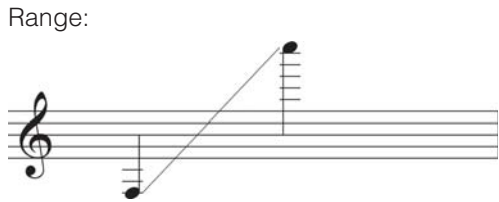
Tube Construction: Brass
Mallets: Chime Hammers
Transposition (sounds): 1 Octave Higher



Xylophone



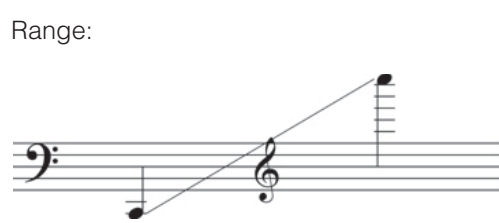
Bar Construction: Rosewood or Synthetic
Mallets: Hard Yarn to Hard Plastic
Transposition (sounds): 1 Octaves Higher



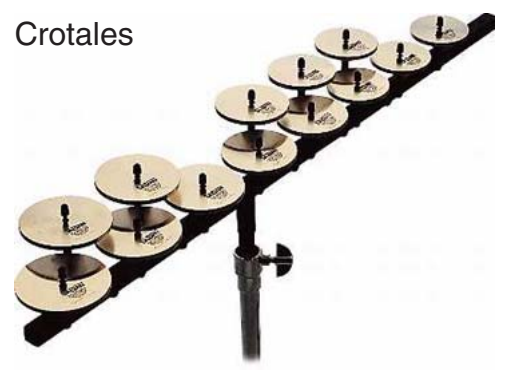
Marimba



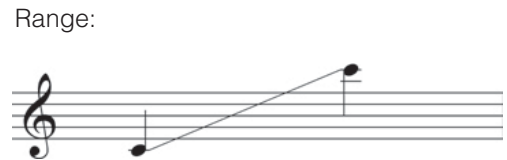
Bar Construction: Rosewood or Synthetic
Mallets: Soft Yarn to Med. Rubber



Crotales



Disc Construction: Brass
Mallets: Medium Rubber to Brass
Transposition (sounds): 2 Octaves Higher

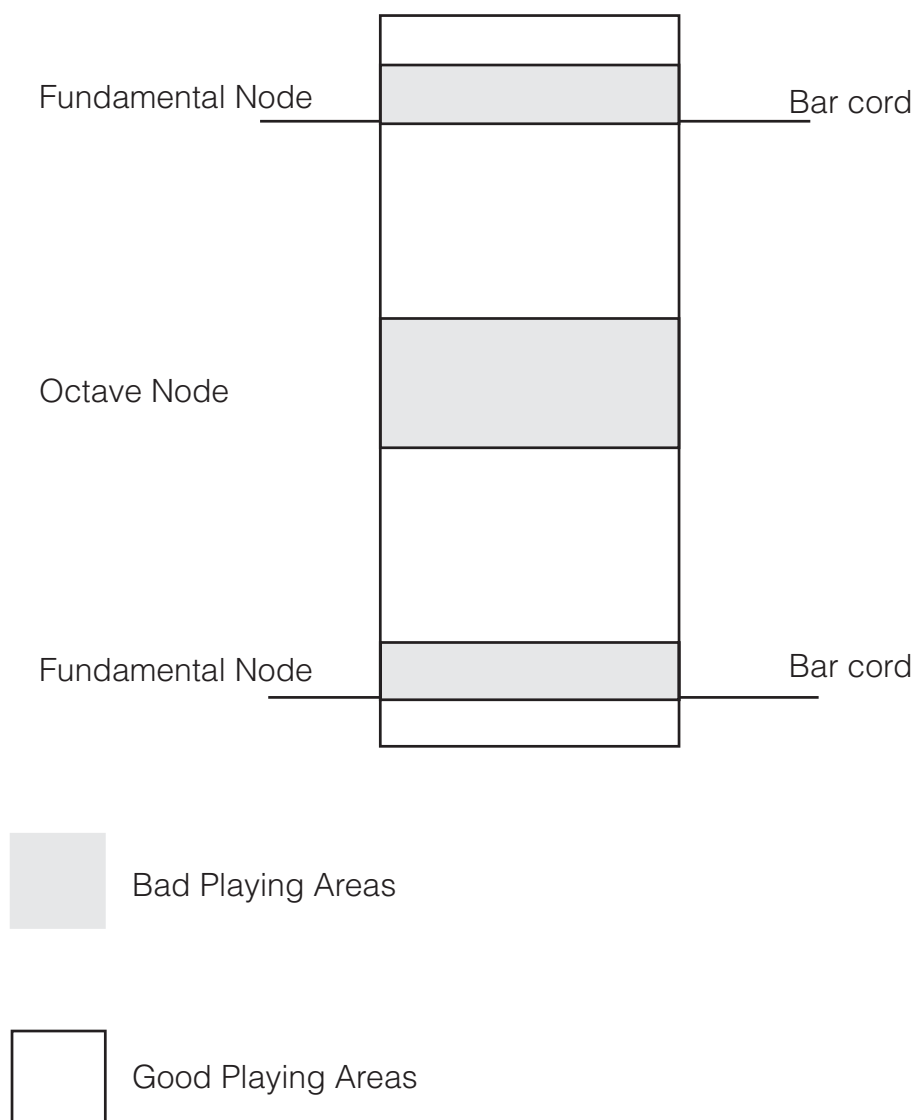


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A Guide to Playing Areas on the Marimba



The center of the bar on the bottom 2 octaves of any marimba is the nodal point of the octave harmonic. Thus, it sounds “Thuddy.” A more open tone, with a strong fundamental and balanced octave content is achieved by striking 1 to 2 inches off-center. You can think of striking over the brass rails that support the tubes. This practice also reduces the breakage of bars as the center is always the thinnest part of the bar.

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Tips on warming-up

The percussive arts are a very physical oriented activity. Several muscle groups and tendons are used when playing percussion. Because of this, it is very easy for students to “hurt themselves” and develop physical problems if they do not **warm-up correctly**.

Basic Warm-Up Approach

1) Start slow and big

- the first step needs to simply get the blood flowing through the player’s arms and hands. A slow, *forte* motion is best for this job. Use any basic pattern, i.e. scale, scale segment, or single note.

2) No Tension

- when beginning to warm-up, it is very important the students play as relaxed as possible. Have them think of nice fluid, “legato”, flowing strokes.

3) Gradually add tempo

- after a couple of minutes at a very slow tempo, gradually increase the speed of playing. Do not go too fast too soon! Make sure it is a gradual increase.

4) Change patterns

- at this point, the player can start moving into some different more complex patterns. For example, some interval work, a segment from an etude or solo they are working on, a new technique they are working on, etc.

It is very important to warm-up before each practice session or performance. The best scenario is using about 20-25 minutes warming up but if you only have 5 minutes, that is better than none at all. If a player just picks up the mallets and starts playing really fast, he/she is more likely to hurt themselves.

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Tips on Scales

Everyone has their own approach to teaching students scales. There is the M,M,m,M,M,M,m interval formula, the circle of 5th's, the relationship from one scale to the next, etc. On keyboard percussion, we can also use the concept of “seeing” the scale on the instrument.

Unlike wind instruments, a mallet percussionists can actually look at the instrument and physically SEE the notes in front of them. We can use this ability to help students to learn their scales.

Take A Picture

Each scale has its own distinctive visual pattern. To better understand this thought, take a look at these diagrams.

C Major Scale



F Major Scale



G Major Scale



Before the student plays the scale, he/she can look at the instrument and SEE the notes and the pattern of the scale. This concept works for minor scales and other modes. This visual tip is also very useful in jazz improvisation work!!

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Selecting the right keyboard mallet for you.

With several different mallet companies and hundreds of different makes and models, it can be a little overwhelming selecting a keyboard mallet. There are several companies with hundreds of models and makes to choose from. Below is a breakdown of the different materials and characteristics for different types of mallets.

Mallet Head Material:

Brass

for bells ONLY. Very sharp distinctive sound; can be damaging to the metal bars if not played properly; not a good choice for younger students

Plastic

for bells and xylophone. The hardness will vary from model to model to expand “color” possibilities. Very good for young students on bells and xylophone.

Cord wrapped

for vibes, marimba or xylophone. The hardness will vary from model to model from soft, med-soft, med, med-hard, and hard. Most commonly used for vibraphone.

Yarn wrapped

for marimba, vibes or xylophone. The hardness will vary from model to model from soft, med-soft, med, med-hard, and hard. Most commonly used for marimba.

Shaft Material:

Birch Shaft

“Rigid” wood feel

doesn't have a lot of *give* to it; total control of the shaft.

4-mallet players using an uncrossed grip favor this type of mallet shaft.

Long shafts

shaft length ranges from 14 to 15.5 inches. This length helps with getting larger intervals during 4-mallet work.

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Rattan Shaft

“Flexible” feel

shaft *gives* a little when making contact with the bars. This can help take away some of the “shock” from your hands during contact

4-mallet players using a crossed grip favor this type of mallet shaft.

Shorter shafts

shaft length ranges from 13.5 to 14 inches

Plastic or Synthetic Shaft

“Flexible” feel

very durable

mostly found on beginner or student line mallets.

Weight:

Light Mallets

core is made out of a light material with very little “wrap” around the core. The lightweight mallets are good for developing players due to less stress on muscles and tendons

Heavy Mallets

core is made out of a heavier material and a latex or secondary wrap can be present around the core. This extra mass can help with the sound quality by activating more of the bar. The heavier mallets may be too difficult for beginner players to control.

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Recommended Mallet Method Books

Beginning Level Students

Carroll, Raynor	<i>Ten Progressive Etudes for the Marimba</i>	Batterie Music
Feldstein, Sandy	<i>Mallet Student (Levels 1 and 2)</i>	CPP Belwin
Peters, Mitchell	<i>Fundamental Method for Mallets</i>	Meredith Music Publications
Whaley, Garwood	<i>Primary Handbook for Mallets</i>	Meredith Music Publications

Intermediate Level Students

Cals, Michel	<i>Manual for the Development of Sight Reading</i>	J. M. Fuzeau
Cirone, Anthony J.	<i>Marimba Duets Volume II</i>	Warner Brothers
Feldstein, Sandy	<i>Mallet Student (Level 3)</i>	CPP Belwin
Green, George	<i>Instruction Course for Xylophone</i>	Meredith Music Publications
Goldenberg, Morris	<i>Modern School for Xylophone, Marimba and Vibes</i>	Hal Leonard
Howarth, Gifford	<i>Simply Four: 4-Mallet Technique as easy as 1-2-3...4</i>	Tap-Space Publication
Stout, Gordon	<i>Ideo-Kinetics</i>	M. Baker Publications
Whaley, Garwood	<i>Musical Studies for the Intermediate Mallet Player</i>	Meredith Music Publications
Zivkovic, Nebojsa	<i>Funny Mallets Book I</i>	Gretel

Advanced Level Students

Arban, J. B.	<i>Complete Conservatory Method for Trumpet</i>	Carl Fischer
Bona, Paschal	<i>Rhythmical Articulation</i>	G. Shirmer
Cirone, Anthony J.	<i>Marimba Duets Volume III</i>	Warner Brothers
Dufrensne, Gaston	<i>Develop Sight Reading</i>	Charles Colin
Goldenberg, Morris	<i>Modern School for Xylophone, Marimba and Vibes</i>	Hal Leonard
Green, George	<i>Instruction Course for Xylophone</i>	Meredith Music Publications
Stevens, Leigh H.	<i>Method of Movement for Marimba</i>	Keyboard Percussion Publications
Stout, Gordon	<i>Ideo-Kinetics</i>	M. Baker Publications
Richards, Emil	<i>Essential Sight Reading</i>	Under Dog Publishing
Zivkovic, Nebojsa	<i>Funny Marimba Book II</i>	Gretel

The next five pages are taken from “*Simply Four: 4-mallet Technique as easy as 1-2-3...4*” by Gifford Howarth through permission from TAP-SPACE Publications. These pages demonstrate the correct way to hold two mallets in your hand when using the Stevens Grip. The complete book is available at the TAP-SPACE booth at PASIC or at www.tapSPACE.com