



Triangle, Concert Bass Drum, Concert Snare Drum Fundamentals

by Marshall E. Maley

HISTORY: Concert Percussion is the newest section (strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion) in the orchestra, yet it is perhaps the world's oldest instrument. It has only been a full member of the orchestra for about 100 years.

Battery Percussion came to Europe *via* the Crusades. The Janisary Bands of the Moors played on bass drum, cymbals, triangle, and tambourine; much like the Shriner/KENA Temple groups in today's parades.

Snare Drum: The snare drum is descended from a mediaeval instrument called a *Tabor* or *Tambour*. The Tabor was a large drum of varied sizes used mostly for communication. Tabor gave way to the *Side Drum* or *Snare Drum*.

Battery percussion was an outdoor phenomenon till it was added to the orchestra. The new environment created new demands on the instruments:

- they had to be quieter since their sound is contained by walls and ceiling
- they had to match the sounds of the orchestra
- snare drum stand was invented (the first folding stand was marketed by Ulysses Leedy in 1895; he said it was superior to placing the drum on a chair)
- snare drums became much smaller and **much more sensitive**
- stick sizes became smaller

Triangle

The triangle is one of the most commonly used accessory percussion instruments in concert music. It is also, however, one of the least understood and respected percussion instruments among young percussionists. While not especially difficult to play, the instrument must be played with proper technique:

- hold the triangle freely suspended at eye level; this allows the sound to travel directly to the audience without being filtered through the ensemble, and it creates a tremendous comfort factor for the conductor who can see the instrument being played;
- playing areas: triangles have infinite sounds; get to know your instrument, try playing in and near the corners, on the bottom side, or the side opposite the opening;
- dynamics: **don't hit it hard**, the acoustics of the triangle allow the sound to cut through most ensemble sounds;
- rolls: only execute rolls in the corners or with two beaters on a triangle suspended from a stand;
NO DINNER CALLS ON THE RANGE!

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Fundamentals



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Bass Drum

The bass drummer can make or break any band, especially a school band. The bass drum is the most powerful instrument in the band. The player must have good time and be able to closely follow the conductor. It is important to remember that the highest paid regular member of John Philip Sousa's band was his bass drummer, August "Gus" Helmecke, who was probably the best concert bass drummer who ever played. Sousa said:

*The average layman does not realize the importance of the bass drummer to a band.... I sometimes think that no band can be greater than its bass drummer, because it is given to him, more than to any person except the director, to reflect the rhythm and spirit of the composition. (Frank Byrne, *The Wind Ensemble and Its Repertoire*, p. 141)*

Fundamentals:

- Mallets: have a variety of mallets (much like tympani); at least try to have soft through hard and light through heavy mallets; include at least one pair for rolls (two headed mallets will work but not as well);
- Tone Production: Strike the drum much like playing tympani; a direct blow; sometimes you can think of it as a wrist flick or snap;
- Set up and muffling: The first consideration is to set up the drum so you can handle it, i.e., a small person may not be able to play the instrument at the same angle as a tall player; REMEMBER: how you angle the drum determines the direction the sound will most clearly travel; Muffle with your free hand on a slanted drum, or use your knee on the playing side & free hand on the other side of a vertical drum;
- Playing areas: playing in the center of the head is much more defined and full; the edge is much less defined and thinner; generally play about half way between the edge and center; use the center for short, accented sounds;
- Dynamics: control dynamics by the size of the stroke, but remember to also use the center *vs.* edge timbres of the drum for additional range;
- Rolls: with two beaters, roll either on opposite sides of the head or both mallets near the same spot; most rolls should be played away from the center of the drum; when using a double headed mallet roll near the edge;
- **WATCH CONDUCTOR:** especially when playing a march, don't become so buried in the music that you lose the conductor's tempo.

[see the enclosed handout "Bass Drum" by Kristen Shiner McGuire or see Al Payson & Jack McKenzie, *Percussion In the School Music Program*, 2nd Edition, Payson Percussion Products, pp. 25-26.]

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Snare Drum

This is the instrument most changed by orchestral influences:

- Rolls: Think musically; try to compliment the sounds of the ensemble; especially think in **LONG TONES**. Learn to play a concert roll; don't always use open rolls;
- Grace note figures: think short sounds; flams should be one sound, not two independent notes; ruffs (sometimes called drags) should generally be closed, sounding like "zap"; multiple grace note figures (four stroke ruffs and larger) should generally be kept short;
- Dynamics: The first rule is to control dynamics by the height of the stroke. Be practical: use larger sticks and drums for consistently loud passages and smaller sticks and drums for softer parts. Use the natural timbres of the drum when appropriate to enhance your sound and dynamics: remember the sound is fuller and louder in the center of the drum and thinner and softer on the edge. Experiment with your rolls here: ex., a loud, thin sounding roll can be achieved on the edge of the head.

Conclusions

- Be musical: listen to section you are supporting
- Be sure of yourself: COUNT ALWAYS
- Be Prepared:
 1. Set up your work space so you know where everything is
 2. Plan ahead: choreograph your moves from instrument to instrument; write notations to yourself into the music (with a pencil) so that you are always ready to play your next part
- Percussionists' relationship with Conductor
 1. Always be able to see the conductor. Rule: Keep your **EYES—INSTRUMENT—MUSIC—CONDUCTOR** all in the same line of vision.
 2. Learn the conductor's traits—know where the beat is in the conductor's movements.
 3. Demonstrate by your actions that you are competent and dependable.
 4. **REMEMBER: the conductor is the BOSS; you must do what the conductor instructs even if it violates everything you know about the instrument you are playing.**

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Concert Percussion Etude

for Snare Drum, Triangle, Bass Drum
Suspended Cymbal, and Crash Cymbals

Moderato
Snare Drum

Marshall Maley

mf *f* *ff* *sfz* *ff*

pp To Triangle

3 **10** Triangle *mf* *f*

To Bass Drum

4 **18** Bass Drum *sfz* *p* *cresc.* *f* *mf*

To Suspended Cymbal *p* Suspended Cymbal

ff To Crash Cymbals

34 Crash Cymbals *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *ff* *f*

To Snare Drum *p* *f* **43** Snare Drum

mf