

# Cymbals

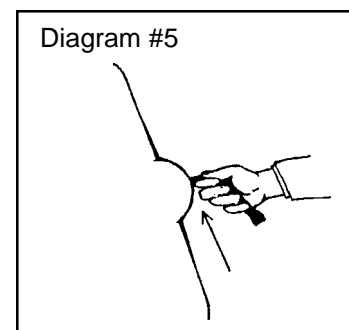
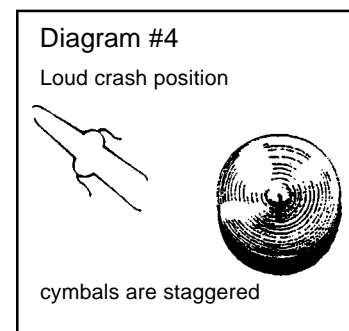
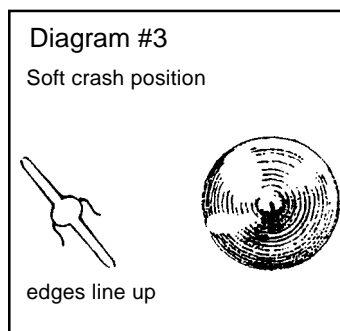
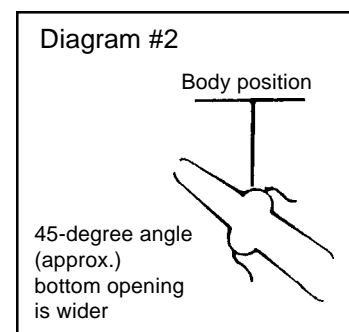
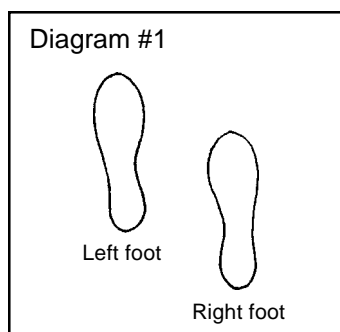
by Christopher Deane

Cymbals are among the most dramatic and magical of all percussion instruments. Each cymbal has a unique musical personality governed by many parameters including types of metal from which the cymbal is made, the process used to make it, and the type of playing and care that the cymbal has been exposed to. Cymbals are also among the most misunderstood of percussion instruments. Poor cymbal playing can be more musically destructive to a performance than poor performing on almost any other percussion instrument. Over the years I have heard some otherwise solid and intelligent players give poor performances on the cymbals both technically and interpretively. Perhaps this is due to the amount of strength that it takes to simply hold the instruments. It is also quite possibly due to certain concepts of showmanship over tone quality that has been cultivated in many of the modern marching and field percussion organizations. Many percussionists imitate what they have seen other players do with cymbals seemingly without listening to the results they get. Players imitate a slicing motion that frequently results in a thin sound, or at worst, an air pocket sound. Often players try to force the sound from a pair of cymbals killing many of the necessary overtones. In my view, the art of cymbal playing is achieved through the development of motion and balance along with a clear concept of what a beautiful cymbal sound really is.

## Basic rules of crash cymbal performance:

1. Stagger the feet to allow freer body movement. (see diagram #1)
2. Hold the pair of cymbals at about a 45 degree angle to the floor. (see diagram #2)
3. Check the dynamic needed so that the cymbals will be in the correct position to one another. (see diagram #3) Louder crashes usually require the cymbals to be staggered, whereas softer crashes or notes require the cymbals' edges to line up. (diagram #4)
4. Touch as little of the cymbal bell as possible. At the moment of the crash it is best to be touching no part of the cymbal, only the strap. (see diagram #5).

A good cymbal sound consists of a union of two parts, a good attack and a good sustain after the attack. Do the following to help develop a good sense of what a cymbal crash should ultimately sound like.



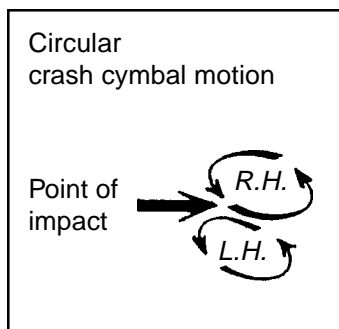
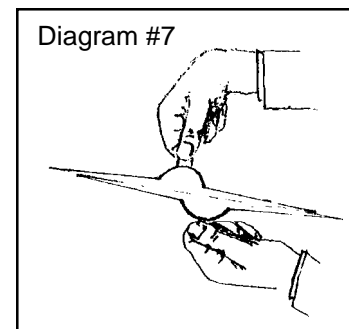
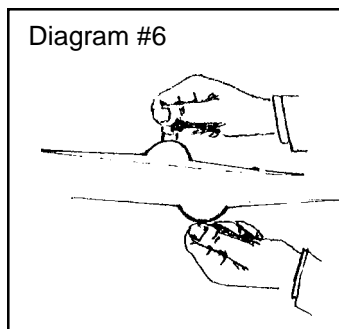
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### The attack:

1. Hold the cymbals in the position for a medium dynamic crash. (diagram #6) Using only the dropping motion of the wrist (not full arm), allow the top cymbal to drop down onto the surface of the bottom cymbal and stay. (diagram #7) The sound should be short in duration but very rich and uninhibited. If any air is present in the sound, change the position of the upper cymbal until no air is trapped between the cymbals.
2. Now begin moving the lower cymbal so that the attack is sustained a little longer as the cymbals vibrate against each other. The important concept is that the player is not hitting the cymbals together forcibly, rather the cymbals are coming together because of their own weight.
3. To complete this aspect of attack development, try to produce a motion (some use a circular motion, both cymbals moving counter clockwise to the player) that allows the cymbals to collide. This is where the balance and motion are combined. Avoid any kind of slicing motion!



### The Sustain:

Suspend both cymbals from a boom stand or goose neck stand ( by the cymbal strap, not by using a metal stand through the cymbal's center hole) and strike both cymbals with a good quality hard vibraphone mallet. The sustained tone quality of the cymbals produced this way should be very close to what is heard when the cymbals are crashed together minus the sound of the attack.

### Soft Crashes:

Consistent soft cymbal notes can be very difficult . Using gravity can be helpful. Try resting the elbow of the arm holding the bottom cymbal against the players side and move the bottom cymbal up to strike the top cymbal. A common practice in high school ensembles is to tap the tips of the plates together rather than the entire circumference of the plates. This results in a thin and unsatisfactory sound.

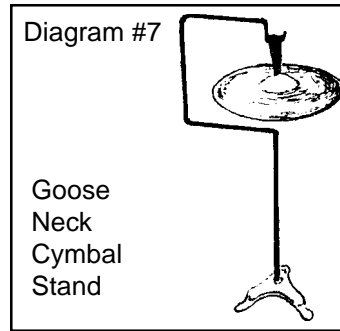
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## Dampening:

To dampen cymbals after a crash, draw the cymbals into the tightened muscles of the abdomen or chest. Two types of dampening should be developed.

1. *Staccato*: Cymbals are deadened completely immediately after striking.
2. *Legato*: Cymbals are dampened more gradually, which gives the effect of a more natural decay.



## Suspended Cymbal

Suspended cymbals are usually thinner than hand held crash cymbals. A richer and more professional sound is always achieved by hanging the cymbal by a strap or bungee cord from a goose neck or boom stand (diagram # 7). Stands that hold the cymbal by providing a center post that comes up through the center hole of the cymbal gives the player more control. Crashes of varying dynamics are done equally as often using a yarn mallet or wooden stick. Rolls are almost always done with the yarn mallets however. (Timpani sticks should rarely, if ever, be used on suspended cymbal parts even if called for by the composer. The sound is not satisfying and it damages the mallet. Substitute yarn mallets whenever possible).