

TIMPANI SURVIVAL 101

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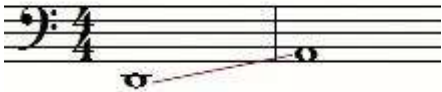
majestic



vic FIRTH

RANGES

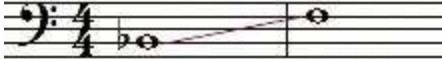
32"



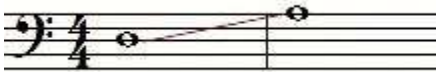
29"



26"

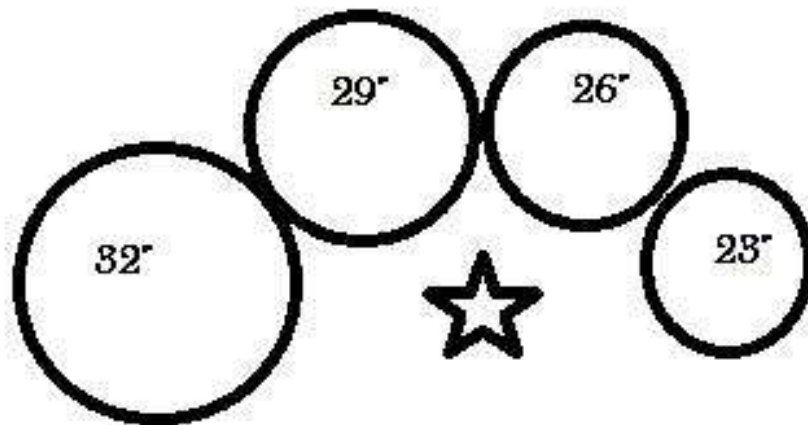


23"



SETUP

Position the body in the center of the drums and rotate the upper body with the hand following the mallets in playing position. Reposition the drums so that the mallets are easily placed over the proper playing area for each drum.



TONE PRODUCTION

Tone Production on ALL percussion instruments is influenced by the rule of “VAP”

- ◎ Velocity
- ◎ Angle
- ◎ Placement

Velocity of the mallet; the angle at which the mallet strikes the instrument; the placement of the mallet on the instrument

PLAYING AREA

- 1. General playing area; ideal mix of resonance and pitch
- 2. Towards center; Dry/Dark/Heavy
- 3. Towards edge; Bright/Thin/Light



Sitting vs. Standing

Sitting

Pro: Feet can be positioned over pedals for tuning changes.

Con: Lacks the freedom of movement that standing provides.



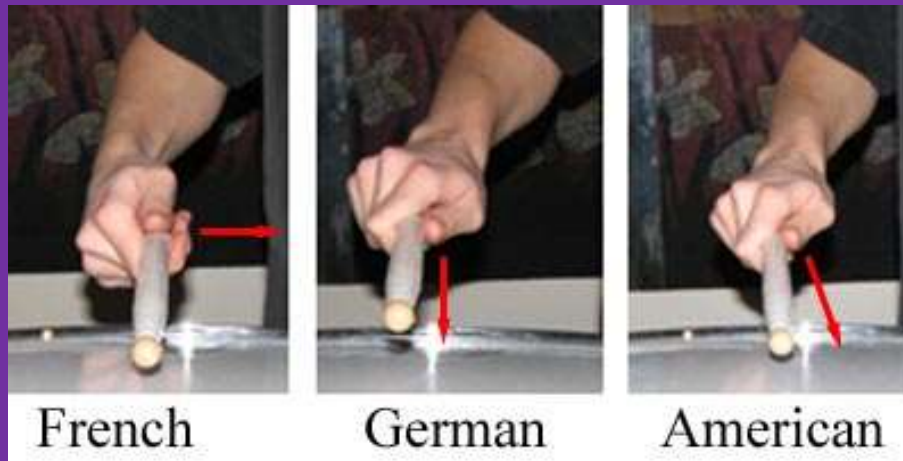
Standing

Pro: Greater freedom of movement.

Con: Feet are off pedals for tuning changes.

GRIPS

- French – thumbs up; similar to a hand-shake
- German – thumbs on the side, index down
- American – in between French and German; thumbs more angled



All grips can and should be used depending on the musical situation and desired tone. Additionally, each grip is solely capable of producing all stroke types and desired tone.

STROKE TYPES

- ◎ Legato – relaxed fingers; slower velocity; minimal attack
- ◎ Staccato – firmer grip; more velocity; focused attack

MALLET SELECTION



A variety of mallets are necessary to achieve all possible tonal colors. Mallets should be thought of in terms of articulations, as opposed to volume. For example, a pianissimo rhythmic passage would require a harder felt mallet to produce rhythmic clarity; a fortissimo resonant passage would require a softer felt mallet to produce a full, rich tone. The following is a general guide to timpani mallet felt qualities and models.

- ◎ *General* - Great for all-around playing. Produces rich tone, yet still capable of rhythmic clarity.
- ◎ *Soft or Cartwheel* - Produces full, rich tone. Ideal for legato strokes and lush roll passages
- ◎ *Medium Hard* - Provides more rhythmic articulation and clarity than a general mallet.
- ◎ *Hard* - Produces more clarity and articulation than a medium hard mallet.

MALLET CARE & MAINTENANCE

- ⦿ Never touch the felt heads. Oil from hands will transfer to the felt, thus reducing the quality and lifespan of the mallet head.
- ⦿ Keep timpani mallets in their own mallet bag separate of other mallets and sticks.
- ⦿ Use a plastic sandwich bag twisted over one head and then the other to keep the mallet heads from touching.



TUNING

(Why is the timpanist smelling his drums?)

- ◎ Start with the pedal down, tap the drum once and pedal up to the desired pitch. Do not “search around” for the pitch. If you miss the intended pitch, place the pedal back down and start again. When tuning during a performance, only the timpanist should be able to hear the tuning process.
- ◎ If you sing or hum the pitch into the drum, it will resonate or “sing” the pitch back when it is in tune. I prefer humming with the mouth closed, as it acts as a natural filter for unwanted overtones.
- ◎ Tuning gauges are a great tool and should be used if and when possible, but never rely solely on the gauges. Gauges should be checked and adjusted regularly. They are great to get pitch in the relative vicinity, but the timpanist should always monitor pitch with the ensemble and make adjustments as necessary.

AURAL TRAINING

- ◉ m2 Jaws; Pink Panther
- ◉ M2 Happy Birthday; Strangers in the Night (Sinatra)
- ◉ m3 Smoke on the Water; Brahms's Lullaby; Hunger Games Whistle
- ◉ M3 Oh When the Saints; Kumbaya
- ◉ P4 Amazing Grace; Here Comes the Bride; Harry Potter Theme
- ◉ TT The Simpsons; Maria (West Side Story)
- ◉ P5 Twinkle Little Star; Star Wars; ABC song
- ◉ m6 The Entertainer; Go Down Moses
- ◉ M6 NBC Theme; It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
- ◉ m7 Star Trek Theme (original); Last Midnight (Into the Woods)
- ◉ M7 Don't Know Why (Norah Jones); second phrase of Take on Me (Ah-Ha)
- ◉ P8 Somewhere Over the Rainbow

STICKING CONSIDERATIONS

- ◎ Always choose sticking patterns that *best fit the musical characteristics*.
- ◎ Alternating strokes are preferred as often as possible, as it allows each stroke to be lifted from the head.
- ◎ When rhythms or phrases are repeated, use the same sticking patterns to achieve the greatest consistency of sound.
- ◎ Avoid cross-overs when possible; use double stickings before crossing and let the hands “get out of the way” of each other.

ROLLS

Timpani rolls are performed as single alternating strokes. The mallets should be a few inches apart to achieve proper resonance. The speed of the roll will vary due to several factors:

- ◉ **Drum size**

Generally – the larger the drum, the slower the roll; the smaller the drum, the faster the roll

- ◉ **Pitch**

Generally – lower pitch = slower roll; higher pitch = faster roll

- ◉ **Dynamics**

Generally – softer dynamics = slower roll; louder dynamics = faster roll

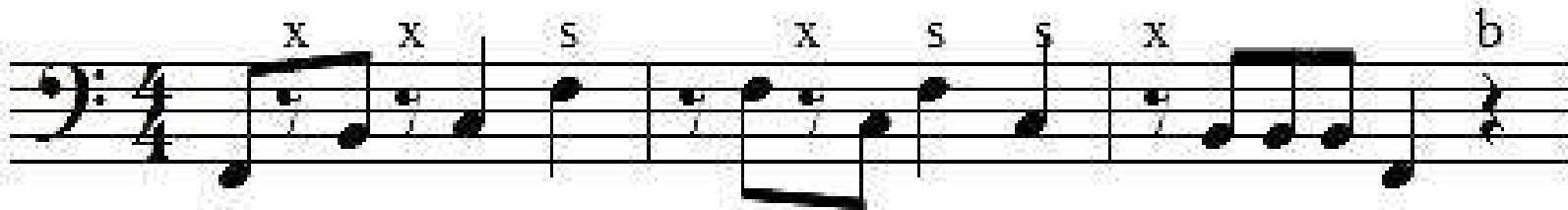
- ◉ **Aesthetics**

A fast roll can create tension; slower rolls can create release/resolution

DAMPENING

- ⦿ Dampening should be done silently with the fingertips touching the head on or near the beating spot.
- ⦿ Use the middle, ring, and pinky fingers to dampen while the index finger and thumb keep the fulcrum on the mallet
- ⦿ Dampening on the beating spot will create the quickest decay.
- ⦿ If a longer decay is desired, dampen to the right or left of the beating spot.
- ⦿ At louder dynamics, it may be necessary to use the heel of the hand in addition to the finger tips.
- ⦿ Many students dampen too frequently; listen to the piece and ensemble to make the best musical decisions.

NOTATING DAMPENINGS



- ◎ (x) duration (note length)
- ◎ (s) simultaneous (for clarity and/or cadences)
- ◎ (b) both pitches

PESKY PEDAL PROBLEM #1:

Pedal will not stay on the lowest note

- ◎ This is happening because the tension on the pedal is greater than the tension on the head. By tightening the head, you will find that the pedal and head become balanced and the pedal should stay on any note within the drum's range. Always use two timpani keys simultaneously on opposite lugs when adjusting head tension.
- ◎ Every pedal on a balanced action timpano has a spring tension adjustment, but this should be used only after you have determined that the head tension is correct. If the drum is in the correct range and tightening the head causes the drum's range to be diminished, you may have to loosen the pedal's tension adjustment.



PESKY PEDAL PROBLEM #2:

Pedal will not stay on the highest note

- ◎ This is usually because the head tension is too high and, as such, the pedal tension cannot balance against the head's high tension.
- ◎ This usually occurs when you are trying to tune a note on the drum that is beyond the upper range. For instance, the 29" can make a comfortable C, but to get to a Db, you have had to tighten the head quite a bit. You may have to lower the head tension and be satisfied that the C is as high as that drum will go or you can tighten the pedal's tension adjustment slightly.



PEDAL PROBLEM KEY POINTS

- ⦿ The pedal tension and head tension must be balanced
- ⦿ If the pedal wants to rise – tighten the head
- ⦿ If the pedal wants to fall – loosen the head
- ⦿ Use two timpani keys simultaneously on opposite lugs
- ⦿ If adjusting the head tension does not work, you can either tighten or loosen the pedal's tension adjustment
- ⦿ Always tighten or loosen anything with the greatest moderation. Use one quarter turn at a time

GENERAL CARE & MAINTENANCE

- ⦿ Move the heel of the pedal down when not in use
- ⦿ Use head covers and drop covers when not in use
- ⦿ Make sure wheels are unlocked prior to transporting
- ⦿ Transport with the pedal up and only grab by the struts – never grab by the collar
- ⦿ If necessary, create signs stating, “This is not a table” to place on drop covers
- ⦿ Teach your students to take pride and care in their equipment
- ⦿ If you haven’t done so already, become best friends with the custodial staff and

SPECIAL THANKS



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