

Percussion Education

Garwood Whaley, editor



Percussion Problems from the Podium

by Robert C. Snider

EDITOR'S NOTE: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Robert C. Snider, a new member of the PAS Education Committee. Robert Snider is a percussionist with the United States Navy Band in Washington, D.C. Bob attended Wichita State University studying percussion with Dr. J.C. Combs. He then transferred to the University of Nebraska where he studied with Albert Rometo and earned a bachelor's degree in music education. Continuing his education, Bob attended Indiana University of Pennsylvania where he studied with Gary Olmstead. After receiving his master's degree in performance, Mr. Snider was employed as assistant director of bands and percussion instructor at the University of Wisconsin in Green Bay.

"If I could just get my section together for a few rehearsals, they'd play so much better and I wouldn't have so many problems with them during full band."

How many times have we thought: if only... For every much needed percus-

sion sectional, up pop the conflicts: track meet, orthodontist appointment, soccer practice; the list is endless. But many problems can be solved during rehearsal without it becoming a "get with it, drummers!" horror story.

PROBLEM	IS CAUSED BY	WHAT TO DO
Simple tambourine rhythms are cluttered with extra jingle sounds	Swinging the tambourine outward before moving it inward to strike against the other hand	Hold the tambourine still in one hand at about a 30° angle and strike with the fingertips or knuckles of the other hand
Tambourine shake rolls fail to have a definite start and/or stop	Rolls are played with just a simple shake	Start and stop each shake roll with a light tap at the indicated dynamic for a precise attack and release
Tambourine jingles ring on after a tap or roll	Tambourine is being held in a vertical position allowing the jingles to ring freely	End the tap or shake with the tambourine in a horizontal position so the jingles lie flat
Calfskin tambourine sounds "flat"	Worn out head or high humidity	Place tambourine over a music stand light before and in between passages or tighten head while playing by squeezing head tighter between thumb and fingers of the holding hand
Triangle has a metallic buzz while played from a music stand	Sympathetic vibrations of the stand from the triangle via the triangle clip	Hold triangle from hand, if it must be hung from stand; place a cloth between the clip and stand to insulate
Triangle sound is more <i>clang</i> than "dting"	Striking hard on the center of one of the triangle sides	Play closer to the closed corners with lighter touch
Triangle has a woody or clickish sound	The old notorious "hit the triangle with the drumstick" trick	Have suitable triangle beaters near the instrument at all times
When quickly dampened, a "whoop" sound comes from the triangle	Muffling the triangle too quickly	Let the triangle "speak" its initial sound, then dampen by quickly rolling the fingers of the holding hand onto the instrument
Triangle roll sounds rhythmic or too agitated	Roll too slow if a rhythm is audible and too fast if very agitated	Play roll from either closed corner at a speed just fast enough to not produce an audible rhythm
Claves have a dead sound	Improper grip	Hold clave in left hand like the traditional right hand snare drum grip. Turn hand over and slide out clave. Slightly lower finger tips closer to palm. Place clave over opening on top of the thumb and fingers. Strike with other clave.

Step one is to organize your section into five areas, or "stations": I. Timpani, II. Bass Drum - Cymbals; III. Snare Drum; IV. Miscellaneous Percussion; and V. Mallet Percussion. Divide the music into the corresponding folders, write the folder number on the part and they'll always be at the appropriate station. This should instantly halt the problem of "lost" music and more than six players reading off the same stand.

Step two is to provide carpet squares or towels that are placed on leveled music stands to be used at each station for trap tables. Noise and commotion from dropped sticks and instruments and the use of the floor as a trap table should be eliminated by using this step.

Step three is to have your percussionists position hand held instruments (triangle, tambourine, etc.) at a height so that they can see the instrument, music and conductor all in the same line of vision. Besides helping the players to focus their concentration on the instrument, the audience is given a chance to see and hear the instruments being performed.

Step four is up to you. By using your eyes and ears and the following hints, you can solve many of your percussion problems from the podium.

PROBLEM	IS CAUSED BY	WHAT TO DO
Latin guiro parts lack that proper "Latin Feel"	Playing all notes as short scrapes	Read the given rhythms as is by playing quarter notes with a long scrape towards the player and eighth notes as short scrapes away from the player
Wood block has a bright but thin note	Playing with tips of wood snare drum sticks	Play wood blocks (and temple blocks) with a hard rubber mallet such as a Musser M-3
Floppy hand castanets	Loose or stretched clapper cords	Tighten and retie as soon as possible, but for a quick fix pull the knot toward you with the first finger and play normally
With motor off, vibraphone tone seems muffled	Resonator disks are in a horizontal position	With the fingers, move disks to a verticle position
Suspended cymbal stand rattles during rolls	Top section of stand is rattling inside middle section	Extend the top section out of the middle as far as possible and adjust the stand height between the middle and lower sections
Suspended cymbal "crashes" sound thin and pingy	Striking the cymbal with the tip of a drum stick between the edge and crown	Strike the edge of the cymbal at about 45° angle with the shoulder or butt end of the drum stick
Suspended cymbal roll sounds cluttered	1) Mallets too hard or too soft 2) Rolling too close to the crown 3) Rolling too fast or with double bounce or buzz strokes	1) Try a medium yarn mallet like a Musser M-5 2) Play at the edges with the left stick at "9:00" and the right at "3:00" 3) Use a single stroke "roll" just fast enough so that a rhythm isn't noticeable
Bass drum rolls sound thin	Using lightweight timpani sticks for rolls	Use two bass drum beaters of similar size and weight or a pair of factory matched bass drum beaters

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principal percussionist with Milwaukee Symphony.
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PROBLEM	IS CAUSED BY	WHAT TO DO
Uneven bass drum rolls	1) One handed roll with a double ball beater (heads are different sizes) 2) Beaters not hitting in the same head area 3) Double bounce bass drum rolls	1) See above 2) Play rolls with the beaters making contact with the head the same distance from the rim 3) Use a single stroke "roll" method with the stroke speed just fast enough to not produce a rhythmic pulse
Snare drummer producing uneven sounds from the drum	1) One stick hitting near the center and the other hitting near the edge of the drum heads 2) One hand playing from a different stick height than the other 3) Cracked and/or taped-up sticks	1) Align the drum so the snare strainer faces your belt buckle and play "over the snares" with the sticks the same distance from the edge and striking within a half inch of each other 2) The stick height of both sticks should be the same unless accents or embellishments are performed 3) Replace sticks
Snares buzzing when drum is not being played	Snares left on during periods of rest	Release snares whenever possible to avoid the sympathetic vibrations
Thin sound coming from a well tuned snare drum	Sticks too light and thin	Use a snare drum stick of a "5A" weight or more for general performance
Mallet parts are being played but are not heard clearly	Mallets used are too soft or light	Try the following types: Bells: hard plastic (Musser M-5) Xylophone: hard plastic or hard rubber (M-5 or M-4) Marimba: semi-hard yarn (M-7) Vibes: hard yarn (M-6)
Chimes don't cut through a full band passage	Chimes sounding much louder near the player and not projecting to the audience	In any passage above a mezzo forte, suggest the player perform the part at least one dynamic stronger
Mallet part being well played with correct mallets but tones are inconsistent	Striking the bar over the nodal points (over the "strings")	Strike near the center of the bars and/or at the extreme near edge of the "black keys"
Crash cymbals and bass drum parts don't enhance a full ensemble entrance	Dampening the sounds before the ensemble release often due to incorrectly notated parts	Encourage players to match the attack and release of the ensemble regardless of what the written note values are
Certain percussion instruments lack their characteristic sound	Students don't have a concept of the sounds some percussion instruments produce	Imitate the following sounds: Bass drum: booom (not thud) Cymbals: crash (not pow) Triangle: dting (not clang) Tambourine: wild folk dancers Xylophone: dancing skeletons Bells: church handbells Chimes: huge church bells
<i>(Reference to mallets by brand name is made only as an example of a type of mallet recommended. The author acknowledges that many suitable mallets are available from different companies and encourages you to try them.)</i>		



Robert Snider



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Percussion Education

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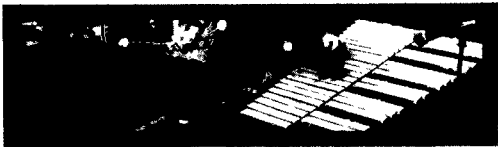
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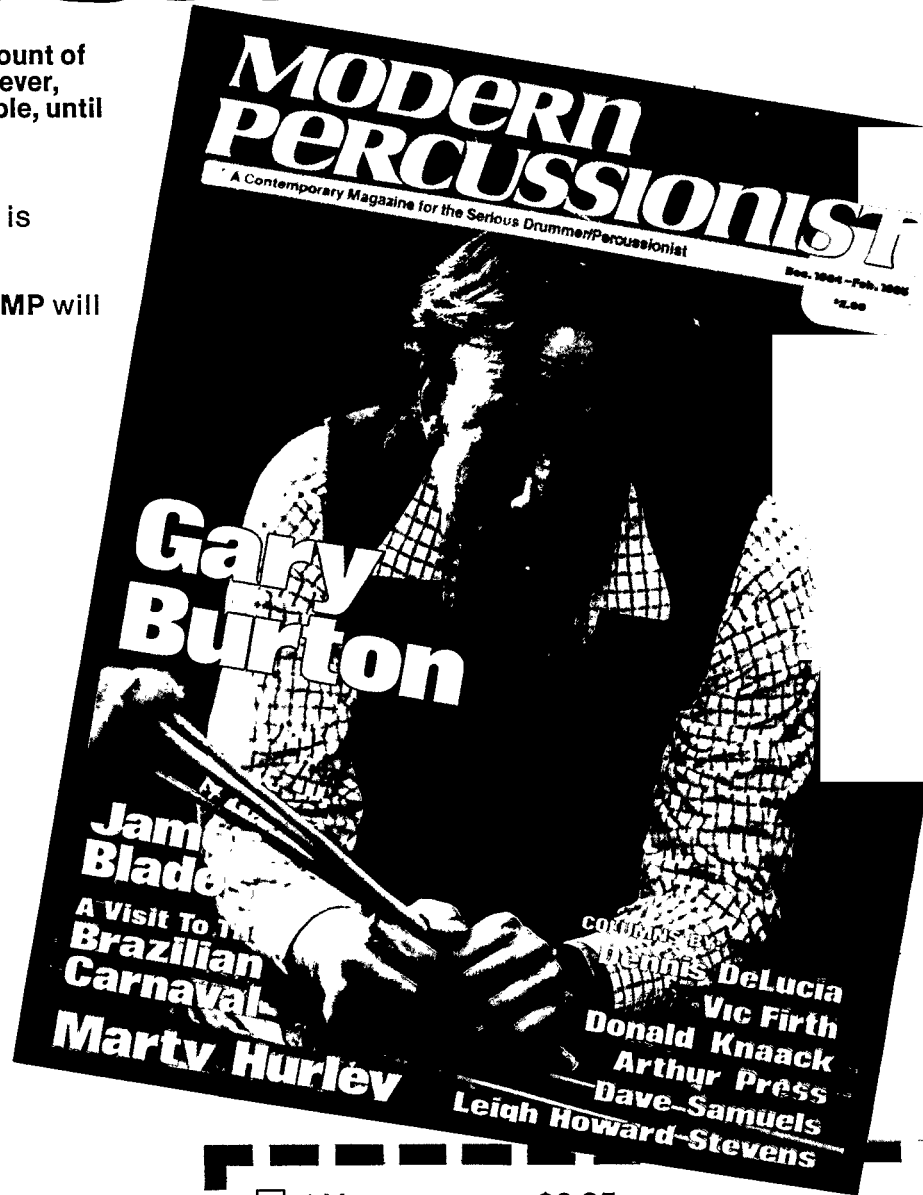
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