

# #MUSICIANSTOO: DEVELOPING THE MUSICAL PERCUSSIONIST THROUGH AN INCLUSIVE BAND WARM-UP ROUTINE

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## PART ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

The full band warm up is an integral component of any band rehearsal. It is a special time dedicated to the development and maintenance of student performance skills, including musical tone, technique, ensemble balance, and section blend. This time also serves to focus the mind during a long academic day, while physically preparing the students for the musical performance tasks required throughout the rehearsal.

Unfortunately, this precious time is often overlooked by band directors who tell the percussionists to “stay out of the way” while the band warms up.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, they are even encouraged to set up their instruments during the warm up period. This happens for many reasons, including class scheduling constraints or a director’s lack of confidence in percussion proficiency. Student percussionists are best served when they are treated and spoken to as musicians and not simply rhythmic technicians.

The full band warm up is an opportunity for percussionists to appreciate the transfer of musical concepts and techniques from one percussion instrument to another. It is also an opportunity for them to continue growing musically on instruments they may not be assigned to play in a particular concert program. Part 1 of this article presents considerations for enhancing student musicianship as well as instructions for implementing this warm up system.

Warm up exercises can vary almost as much as the instruments on which percussionists are expected to functionally perform. Percussion instruments share many physical approaches, yet retain some instrument-specific performance skills. For example: a tenuto note on snare drum is an arm motion starting with the stick “up”/ending “down”, while a tenuto note on hand cymbals starts with the cymbals apart and ending with them very close together.

Percussion instruments serve three different purposes in the band literature: melodic (on top of the texture), harmonic/rhythmic (musically supportive and within the texture), and coloristic

(special musical highlights). These three percussive roles are explored within the exercises outlined in the next paragraph. Each instrument also requires its own progression of performance skills. The sample exercises included in this article are designed to be adapted to any warm up routine, while addressing all the above concerns.

## MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERCUSSION

Warm up exercises for woodwinds, brass, and percussionists focus on the following four areas of musicality: Tone, Articulation, Rhythm, and Fingers and Flexibility.<sup>1</sup> Each instrument has unique musical and technical skills to develop. These skills are outlined below.

### TONE:

#### *WW/Brass Considerations:*

- Air (free blowing, warm)
- Posture (sit up straight, feet flat, head level, shoulders strong, but relaxed, instrument held appropriate height/angle)
- Embouchure (efficient; appropriate firmness)
- Tuning (Listening, fingering, oral cavity/tongue position, instrument length)

#### *Percussion Considerations<sup>1</sup>:*

- Posture (flat feet/shoulder-width, knees relaxed, hips centered, straight back, head level, relaxed shoulders and elbows)
- Grip = Embouchure (fully-supportive hand; relaxed, yet firm fingers)
- Stroke = Air (smooth, connecting, free-flowing)
- Tuning (instrument, grip, stroke, playing area, implement)

### ARTICULATION:

#### *WW/Brass Considerations:*

Wind players must develop finger, tongue, and air independence. This is accomplished through regular practice of tenuto, staccato, legato, and marcato articulations. The type of tongue action required for a legato note is drastically different than the type of tongue a marcato note uses. Interestingly, similarities may be found between the action of the tongue on a reed or in a mouthpiece and the action of a percussion implement on a surface.

#### *Percussion Considerations:*

##### STRIKE INSTRUMENTS<sup>1</sup>:

- Legato (fully-supportive grip, smooth & connected wrist stroke and lift)
- Staccato (firm grip, quick wrist stroke and lift)
  - looks similar to upstroke

Tenuto (fully-supportive grip, heavy arm stroke with little rebound)  
Marcato (firm grip, quick arm stroke and lift)  
- combination of staccato grip and stroke, but with tenuto arm

#### CRASH INSTRUMENTS:

Same considerations as the strike instruments. Think of the moving crash instrument as the implement and the motionless instrument as the striking surface. For example, legato notes on hand cymbals require a moderate hand speed that begins with the cymbals apart and ends with them apart while maintaining a fully-supportive grip on the straps. A tenuto note requires a fully-supportive grip and a moderate hand speed where the cymbals begin apart and end very close together.

#### SHAKE INSTRUMENTS:

Shake instruments, such as sleigh bells and shakers, manipulate their articulations largely by changing their attack qualities with proportional variations of velocity and height. The faster the instrument is moved, the harder the impact of the shaker beads on the inside-wall of the instrument, resulting in a sharper, more articulate attack. A softer attack and longer note is created when these instruments are moved slower. Additionally, the larger the motion, the louder the sound. The smaller the motion, the softer the sound. Tambourine players should practice playing both shake and thumb rolls during any of these exercises.

#### SCRAPE INSTRUMENTS:

Articulations on scrape instruments, such as guiro or brushes on a drum, are performed by changing the length of the scrape action. Short scrapes result in short sounds. Long scrapes result in long sounds. Dynamics can be altered through implement pressure on the surface in addition to scrape speed. A fast speed results in louder sound. A slower speed results in a softer sound.

#### RHYTHM:

##### *WW/Brass Considerations:*

It is important for ALL band students to sight read a variety of rhythms in different meters, styles, tempi, and keys. These variations challenge the students in unique ways and develop the player's physical and mental flexibility and dexterity. Different rhythms require different uses of the tongue, fingers, and air. With regular reading, wind players learn to

overcome their many tendencies (Examples: shortening dotted notes and lengthening the notes that follow; playing the first two notes of a triplet too long).

#### *Percussion Considerations:*

Percussionists must learn to overcome the challenges of performing different rhythms on many types of instruments. Alterations of the rhythms (dynamics, tempo, style, etc.) can provide further challenges. Each category of instruments presents distinct problems for the percussionist to conquer.

#### STRIKE INSTRUMENTS:

Percussionists are expected to be rhythm technicians. Because they are often required to perform complicated rhythmic content, keep the students on their feet by having them read a wide variety of rhythms in different meters and tempos during warm ups. A strong variety of rhythms will challenge the students' ability to perform stick control, two-height, embellishment, and roll passages.

Remember, the roll base will change depending on the length of the note, tempo, and style. Shorter rhythms use less strokes than longer rhythms. And long rhythms at a fast tempo may also require fewer strokes to create a sustained sound. Fast rhythms require careful consideration of stickings. Generally, the more repeated strokes performed by the same hand, the weaker each subsequent stroke sounds. This natural effect may be useful for certain phrasing and style considerations. Alternating sticking is the default method for performing rhythms on strike instruments. However, it is necessary to develop dexterity through a series of "stick control" exercises which include a variety of rhythms and sticking combinations.

#### CRASH INSTRUMENTS:

Crash instruments, such as hand cymbals and claves, are typically performed by keeping one instrument motionless while using the other instrument as the implement (the mover). This limits the speed and rhythms the player can perform. Therefore, when developing the rhythmic content of warm up exercises, their rhythms appear to be simpler. However, it is important to challenge your percussionists by presenting fast or complicated rhythm passages that will require the players to discover and develop some techniques for themselves.

### SHAKE INSTRUMENTS:

It can be very difficult to perform rapidly changing rhythms on shake instruments, perhaps why these instruments are commonly found playing simpler repeating rhythms for long stretches of time. However, it is necessary to challenge the percussionists to perform difficult changing rhythms. Percussionists will notice it is a matter of “hurry up and wait” to perform these rhythms. To achieve a clear articulation, the instrument will need to be moved quickly. This quick motion makes the space between notes a little longer, resulting in a slightly elongated pause.

### SCRAPE INSTRUMENTS:

Rhythms on scrape instruments combine the stroke considerations of strike instruments with the limited rhythmic vocabulary of crash instruments. Stickings—the up and down motions—should be chosen so the implement can smoothly glide along the instrument to protect the integrity of tone and timing.

## FINGERS AND FLEXIBILITY

### *WW/Brass Considerations:*

Wind players and percussionists all share the need to strengthen and expand their facility. And each instrument requires special individual attention to acquire this facility. Because of the unique challenges presented by each woodwind, brass, and percussion instrument, band directors at all levels must be creative when developing a curriculum of flexibility exercises. Woodwind players need to work on “crossing the break”, flip-flops, or ring/little finger technique. Brass players must work on lip slurs, flip-flops, or ring finger technique.

### *Percussion Considerations:*

Percussionists have unique control needs, including dynamic range, speed, navigating large instruments, and rhythmic clarity.

Playing softly on strike instruments can be very difficult. It is important to use the appropriate muscle groups for playing a particular passage. For example, it takes some experimenting to know how to use a large muscle group (i.e. the arm) for playing soft articulate passages and how the fingers aid in the performance of fast single strokes.

Rapid changes in dynamics cause problems for strike instruments. It is important to keep a consistent tone while changing height. This will require the player to try altering the grip, stroke, finger pressure, stickings, playing areas, and timing of the stroke. The percussionist may even consider changing the specific instrument model to an instrument that aids the musical performance.

As the players gain control of basic rhythms (quarter notes, eighth notes, eighth notes), slowly introduce quicker rhythms within the same technique exercise patterns. For example, replace a series of eighth notes with sixteenth notes. Instead of changing all four eighth notes, try changing the first and third eighth notes with two sixteenth notes each. Tambourine players should be challenged to add faster rhythms while exploring the knee-fist technique.

Another example of changing basic exercises to become more challenging is to have your percussionists play Stick Control exercises as streams of triplets or sixteenths. This will change the player's control and reading capabilities. It is also necessary to experiment with playing basic rhythms with stickings that do not flow naturally. Have the percussionists play extended phrases of rhythms on a single hand to improve dexterity and increase wrist and finger control.

Performing leaps on timpani and mallet instruments is difficult because of the increased eye movement around the instruments while managing a large distance between notes. Large leaps require the player to rely on muscle memory and a lot of mental focus. Leaps also present issues with tone (inaccurate playing areas and grip changes), rhythms and stickings, and phrasing.

Playing evenly across the entire range of musical instruments is challenging for any instrumentalist. For percussionists, the particular instrument model, stick/mallet, and playing area all affect the projection of the musical sound. In general, a softer mallet will effortlessly produce long notes with little attack, but will require a firmer grip and faster stroke to produce a clearer attack.

### **MUSICAL PHRASING<sup>1</sup>**

All percussion instruments rely on special treatments of the attack of each note to create the illusion of note length control. Even the most sustaining instruments require repeated attacks to create a sustained and stable sound. Phrasing is created by using similar approaches on all percussion instruments to add direction to the music. Repeated rhythms on the same note need to groove and emphasize the meter with agogic accents on the

beginning of each measure or note grouping. A stream of ascending pitches may crescendo while a stream of descending pitches may decrescendo. Sustained notes must avoid becoming stagnant by getting louder or softer.

When playing unmarked lyrical passages, such as excerpts from a Bach cello suite, the percussionist must make choices to create the appropriate musical style. Any of the ideas mentioned earlier are good places to start. However, the percussionists must learn to manipulate the attacks and natural instrument resonance to create an *artistic* sound. Percussionists must also have the appropriate implements that provide musical flexibility and nuance to perform artistically. Remember, there is no such thing as “the loud mallets” or “the quiet mallets.” The player makes dynamic and style decisions, not the implements. The player should choose sticks and mallets that allow him or her to play all the desired musical nuances with the understanding that he or she is solely responsible for creating those nuances through stroke manipulation.

To discover ways to perform music artistically, think of how a cellist would perform. For example, to play a stream of notes connected by a single slur, the cellist begins with a strong bow motion with the arm. This initial attack isn’t abrasive or brittle. It’s dark and weighty, a sound created by using the arm to initiate it. The second note is naturally softer because the bow simply slides over the string to create the sounding note. The first few notes which follow the attack note are what I call “hiding within the resonance” of the initial arm stroke. The first sound was so big and resonant that its resonance is still heard through the first few notes of the stream. This lingering resonance creates the illusion that the notes are all connected together without a break between them, just like the air between a woodwind note or the bow motion of a cellist.

## HOW TO USE THIS SYSTEM

### PITCHED PERCUSSION

Pitched percussion instruments, such as timpani and mallet instruments, are tuned to include specific pitches, each with a variety of ranges. These pitches provide the unique opportunity for percussionists to perform melodic and harmonic roles within a music ensemble. Think of the pitched percussion parts as a third melodic section independent of the woodwinds and brass, but dependent on the structure of the woodwinds and brass exercises.

A flute part, for example, is a good place to start for mallet players because its clef, range, and reading requirements are similar to those of mallet instruments. It is also useful to develop bass clef reading skills by reading from the trombone and tuba parts on the lower octaves of the marimba. Mallet instruments can use any C-instrument parts

(flute, oboe, bassoon, trombone, or tuba) during the warm up routine. Timpani can use improvised parts, director-written parts, or tuba parts.

Instead of the pitched-instrument percussionists simply reading a wind instrument part of every exercise and rolling the entire time, have them insert different rhythms in the space of the long tones. Stickings, dynamics, and pitch and rhythmic contours can also be altered. For rhythm and sticking ideas, have the mallet players reference the Strike Percussion part within the Long Tones chart while reading from a woodwind or brass part.

Warm ups may be played on any mallet instrument. However, some instruments, such as glockenspiel and chimes, have a limited range and may require rapid and regular transpositions. Because of the challenges on these particular instruments, it may be best to limit warm ups to marimba, vibraphone, and xylophone. Of course, it is useful to have a student warm up on another instrument if they perform it in the concert program and need more time behind the instrument.

## **NON-PITCHED PERCUSSION**

All percussion instruments are classified by the method in which they are performed: strike, crash, shake, and scrape. Based on their classification, the non-pitched percussion instruments—ones that do not produce a definite pitch—are all included in the warm up by using specially-designed exercises. These instruments primarily serve rhythmic and coloristic musical roles, but occasionally get soloist treatment. Rhythmic and coloristic material tend to be musically undemanding. The sample exercises not only prepare percussionists for these moments, but also for long soloistic passages.

These exercises include a variety of rhythms and stickings created for specific ability levels to use on any non-pitched percussion instrument. Each pattern is designed to be flexible and used with virtually any full band exercise. Additionally, the patterns are presented in a progression that allows the percussionists to establish and develop tone, coordination, control, and ensemble skills in all four areas of non-pitched percussion.

On World Percussion instruments, such as congas and bongos, it is practical to explore the different tones, special techniques, and style patterns during the full band warm up. This is possible by reading the Strike Percussion part and assigning each hand to a different or same tone, for example, while altering the written stickings to explore Afro-Cuban tumbao and martillo patterns.



Because each warm up exercise may last only a few repetitions in a single rehearsal routine, the director may choose a series of patterns for the percussionists that will help them build a skill found within the concert program. (Examples of non-pitched percussion exercises will be included in Part Two.)

A list of popular pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments is included at the end of this article.

### **DEVELOP A ROUTINE:**

- 1) Select and announce the woodwind, brass, pitched percussion patterns
- 2) Announce the relevant information concerning key, articulation, rhythm, etc.
- 3) Announce the non-pitched percussion pattern
- 4) Announce the relevant information concerning articulation, rhythm, sticking, etc.
- 5) Play!

#### **EXAMPLE:**

- 1) *“Woodwinds and brass play the F-Major scale in whole notes, one octave down. Brass, play the F-Major lip slur Pattern #1. Pitched percussion play four alternating quarter notes for every written note.”*
- 2) *“Pitched percussion, brass, and woodwinds, play legato.”*
- 3) *Non-pitched percussion, play #5 of your Long Tones page.”*
- 4) *“Also, non-pitched percussion, please observe that the pattern changes to double strokes at m. 5.*

It may look as though it takes a long time to recite so many instructions just for one exercise. *You're right!* However, a routine that both students and directors can rely on adds structure and order to a rehearsal. It also helps to create an engaging and exciting performance environment.

Though the first rehearsals may take a little explanation of the instructions for each section of the band, maintaining a routine order of exercises will greatly speed up the process of giving instructions and will allow for more playing time. Remember, though a routine order of varying exercises is important, it is necessary that each exercise continues to challenge and develop the skills of the student performers.

Also, generate a list of skills the students will need to be able to perform by the end of the semester. Form a timeline and structure for when and how each skill will be incorporated into the routine.

## STATION ROTATIONS

Try using a *rotation* system to give each student the opportunity to experience as many instruments during a single rehearsal and semester as possible. There are many possible rotation systems, so feel free to try other ways that best fit your rehearsal setting. No matter the system, always include snare drum, mallet instruments, timpani, and a variety of accessory and world instruments. The world instruments and accessories should change on a regular basis to expose students to as many as possible. The accompanying exercises are designed for any possible percussion instrument to be played and are arranged by their performance classification: *strike, scrape, crash, and shake*.

### ROTATION EXAMPLE #1:

One possible system is to have the students perform the entire warm up routine on a single instrument. The students would rotate through a different station each day.

#### **EXAMPLE 1:**

#### **John Doe Warm Up Instrument Assignment**

Monday: Snare Drum

Tuesday: Marimba

Wednesday: Triangle

Thursday: Bass Drum

Friday: Hand Cymbals

An advantage to this system is that it gives the students a lot of time to get comfortable with the tasks on one instrument at a time. However, it is not inclusive and may limit the potential for seeing the transfer of skills from instrument to instrument.

## ROTATION EXAMPLE #2:

A second possible system is to have the students rotate around all the stations in a single warm up period. Each station has one instrument and a copy of the percussion warm up exercises. Students must begin at a different station each day so they can perform all the exercises at all the stations in a week.

### EXAMPLE 2:

#### Community High School Rehearsal Warm Up Rotation John Doe Warm Up Instrument Assignment

Monday: Begin on Snare Drum

Tuesday: Begin on Marimba

Wednesday: Begin on Triangle

Thursday: Begin on Bass Drum

Friday: Begin on Hand Cymbals

Instrument Order: Snare Drum, Marimba, Triangle, Bass Drum, Hand Cymbals

An advantage of this system is that the students perform on every instrument at each rehearsal. A disadvantage of this system is that it may take a moment for the students to get set at each new instrument station.

In Part 2, I'll provide specific examples of stick control, two-height, embellishment, and articulation exercises to use within this system. Of course, these examples serve as a starting point for directors and instructors to assemble personalized exercises. I'll also provide ideas on how to include these exercises within five popular band warm ups. •

## PITCHED PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS<sup>1</sup>

Glockenspiel  
Vibraphone  
Xylophone  
Marimba  
Chimes  
Crotales  
Steel Pan  
Timpani  
Almglocken

## NON-PITCHED PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

### STRIKE

Snare Drum  
Bass Drum  
Concert Toms  
Djembe  
Cajón  
Congas  
Bongos  
Tambourine  
Triangle  
Tam tam  
Suspended Cymbal  
Woodblock

### CRASH

Hand Cymbals  
Claves

### SCRAPE

Guiro  
Brushes on Snare Drum

### SHAKE

Tambourine  
Shakers

**Dr. Brandon Arvay** currently lives in Lexington, KY where he serves as Adjunct Instructor of Percussion at Centre College, regularly performs with the Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra, and serves as the percussion instructor for the Central Kentucky Youth Orchestras. He holds degrees from the University of South Carolina (B.M.E.), Colorado State University (M.M.), and the University of Kentucky (D.M.A.). He has conducted and coached a variety of ensembles, including the award-winning University of Kentucky Percussion Ensemble at the 2014 Percussive Arts Society International Convention. In his travels, he has performed throughout China and was featured on China Central Television.

For more information on Brandon's activities, please visit [www.brandonarvay.com](http://www.brandonarvay.com).

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This is a common phrase in middle school, high school, and college band rehearsals I have attended.

<sup>1</sup> From Scott Atchison's "Full Band Sonority."

<sup>1</sup> Check out Julie Davila's FUNdamentals article on these topics here:

<http://www.pas.org/docs/default-source/pasic-archives/gripstrokes.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

<sup>1</sup> For more information on these percussion concepts of Strike, Crash, Scrape, and Shake, see James Campbell's source entries in "Band Expressions" by Alfred Publishing Company.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on musical phrasing, click here: <http://www.pas.org/docs/default-source/SoundEnhancedPdfs/rhythmic-interpretation-articulation-markings-and-musical-shape.pdf>