



ACCESSORY CHOPS: DEVELOPING TONE AND PRECISION WITH TAMBOURINE, TRIANGLE, AND CASTANETS

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Our percussion students are pulled in many directions as we try to develop each one into a “total percussionist.” Most students have instruments they prefer, as well as others they tend to avoid. Even the most well-rounded percussionist may not be exposed to the basics of fundamental sound production on the accessory percussion instruments. Including these instruments in the weekly routine of your percussion section is a unique challenge, especially for the non-percussionist band director with many demands and responsibilities of their own.

It is very easy, and common, to neglect the accessory percussion instruments until a student comes face to face with a part assignment in concert band, often with a performance date quickly approaching. The student may understand the rhythm and musical instructions, but might not be proficient at the mechanics of playing the instrument. Or, the student may understand the basics of holding the instrument but lack the technical development to play accurate rhythms in time with the ensemble. Students playing accessory instruments are usually playing solo, without much rhythmic support from other players in the ensemble, and certainly without anyone doubling on the same instrument. Combine this musical demand with an instrument that is not familiar, and most students learn to avoid this unpleasant experience altogether.

This article will present three “student-friendly” sections, one each for tambourine, triangle, and castanets. Each of these student-oriented pages can be given directly to students in a class setting or private lesson. One practical way to use these pages with students would be to give a class one section per week and incorporate accessory playing into the regular warmup routine. Many times, students are overloaded with too much information about all the accessory instruments at once, without much opportunity to reinforce skills on each one.

Finally, this article contains educational suggestions to assist the non-percussionist band director in implementing these exercises with your students. Remember, students learn best by experiencing each of these skills first-hand, so take your time and have fun learning and teaching these instruments with your students!

TAMBOURINE

EQUIPMENT: A 10-inch, double row tambourine (A) is recommended for band and orchestra. Jingles may be made of silver, bronze, copper, or a combination of these. Use bees wax (B) or bow rosin (C) around the edge of the head for more control and traction when playing thumb or finger rolls. Never mix wax and rosin together!



SOUND PRODUCTION: Hold the tambourine at a 45-degree angle with the non-dominant hand. This playing angle keeps the jingles resting at the bottom of the posts, where they produce the most articulate attack. Use the thumb, middle finger, and ring finger together to strike the tambourine 1 - 2 inches from the edge of the head. Play a shake roll by starting and ending with a tap, and center the shake roll on a vertical plane. Move the tambourine as fast as possible, but not more than a few degrees from vertical position. Play a thumb or finger roll by sliding around the edge of the drumhead, using wax or rosin for more grip. End these rolls with an attack from the bottom of the hand near the wrist.

RHYTHMIC EXERCISE: Play on a snare drum and master the rhythms and dynamics, using a metronome to gradually build up to the given tempo. Play on the tambourine using the techniques indicated, and produce the same energy, dynamics, and rhythmic accuracy on the tambourine as when you play the snare drum.

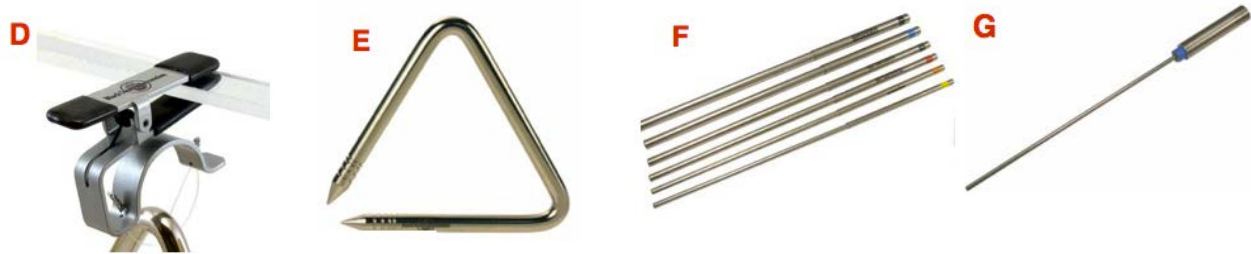
$\text{♩} = 144$

The exercise is written on three staves of music in 2/4 time, with a tempo of 144 beats per minute. The first staff begins with a forte (ff) dynamic and features a 'shake roll' and a 'thumb or finger roll'. The second staff starts with a piano (p) dynamic and includes 'thumb/finger' and 'knee/fist' techniques. The third staff continues with 'thumb/finger' and 'fist' techniques, with dynamics ranging from mezzo-piano (mp) to fortissimo (ff).

READY FOR MORE? Ask your teacher about playing the tambourine part, or the "orchestral excerpt" from *Carnival Overture* by Antonin Dvořák. Your teacher can help you locate the printed music and recordings to listen to as you learn this standard piece from the orchestral repertoire.

TRIANGLE

EQUIPMENT: Use a clip (D) like the one shown and hold up the triangle at eye level unless the musical demand of the situation requires it to be mounted. A 6-inch triangle (E) is most common. Be sure that the overtones of the music stand are not present in the sound of the triangle if playing with the triangle clipped to a stand.



Use a piece of fabric in between the clip and music stand to prevent this issue. Use either a rod-style beater (F) or a Stoessel-style beater (G), depending on the desired tone.

SOUND PRODUCTION: Hold the triangle at eye level and play on either the horizontal side (bottom) or the side across from the open corner. Consider the size and striking point of the beater and select the right tone, or timbre, for the musical situation. Roll in either corner except for the open corner. Experiment with different angles when striking the triangle. Each instrument is different and will produce slightly different sounds. For some instruments, striking the triangle parallel to the vertical plane (up and down) can sometimes create a more blended sound than playing perpendicular to vertical plane (forward and back), which produces a more precise pitch. Vibrato can be created with the clip hand or the free hand.

RHYTHMIC EXERCISE: Master this exercise on the snare drum first. Then, hold the clipped triangle and play with one beater. Or, attach the triangle to a stand with two clips and use two beaters on the flat-facing side to play the more difficult rhythms.



READY FOR MORE? Ask your teacher about playing the orchestral excerpts from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* and Ottorino Respighi's *Pines of Rome*. Your teacher can help you locate the printed music and recordings to listen to as you learn these standard pieces from the orchestral repertoire.

CASTANETS

EQUIPMENT: Castanets are made of rosewood or other high-quality wood, or plastic. Shown below are paddle castanets (H) and mounted castanets (I). The tension and response of the castanets are adjustable, so check each castanet for the best response and match the pair of castanets to feel the same. Whether made of wood or plastic, castanets are fragile. Store them in a safe place and be careful when handling and playing this instrument.



SOUND PRODUCTION: Use a controlled stroke holding the paddle castanets, and hold at eye level so the instrument is seen and heard. Or, using the machine to mount the castanets, play lightly on the top castanet using two or three fingers.

RHYTHMIC EXERCISE: Master this exercise on the snare drum, then play using the machine setup or paddle castanets. Insist on the same rhythmic accuracy as with snare drum or any other instrument.



READY FOR MORE? Ask your teacher about playing the orchestral excerpts from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio Espagnol* and Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. Your teacher can help you locate the printed music and recordings to listen to as you learn these standard orchestral pieces. You may also want to become familiar with the glopè, double glopè, and caretilla. These are rhythmic figures that are used often in band and orchestral music.

Percussion students need plenty of practice time to become comfortable playing accessory instruments. One practical way for teachers to provide this opportunity is to include accessories into the daily warm-up routine. Try creating a weekly rotation for percussionists to spend time on each instrument during the regular warm-up. Students can play simple rhythms or basic techniques on accessories while wind or string players are playing long tones, scale patterns, articulations, or other basic skills. Remember, percussionists need just as much reinforcement on basic skills as the other members of the ensemble, and their time is divided between many instruments!

As mentioned earlier, most accessory percussion playing is a solo within the ensemble. While your percussion students are becoming comfortable with the accessory instruments, consider creating a more comfortable learning environment by having students play in a group setting. If you have several tambourines, allow students to play in a group. This places less demand on the individual student and distributes the musical responsibility for time and rhythm among several players. Another solution would be assigning a student to double the snare drum or concert tom part on an accessory instrument during rehearsal, leaving this extra part assignment out during the performance. Challenge your students to play appropriate material from a snare drum method book on any accessory instrument, using as much attention to musical detail and dynamics as one would expect from snare drum, mallet percussion, or timpani.

Consider giving an individual playing assignment or graded test on one of the accessory instruments, using material from band and orchestral literature, etudes from a method book, or the short etudes featured in this article. Your students will benefit from all of the detailed, written feedback you can provide. If your band students have the option of “challenging” other members of the section for placement or “chair order,” try requiring this challenge to be completed on an accessory instrument. Your students will begin to view these instruments with a new sense of importance and artistry.

Most music educators agree that rehearsal time is at a premium, and none of us have enough of it. Want to save time in rehearsal? Teach and reinforce skills on tambourine, triangle, and castanets before your student is on the hot seat with a concert date approaching. It will reduce your stress level from the podium, and your students will gain new appreciation for making music with these instruments. •

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