

MASTERING SUSPENDED CYMBAL ROLLS

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Often overlooked and underemphasized, the suspended cymbal is one of the most improperly played instruments in the percussion section. Because of the seemingly simple technical and musical requirements of the instrument, precise pedagogy that creates appropriate sounds and promotes musical expression is often unintentionally excluded.

Many techniques can be used to create a variety of sounds on a suspended cymbal. However, this article will focus on suspended cymbal rolls. Below are the most important contributors to sound production, followed by exercises through which to master a sustained sound and dynamic contrast.

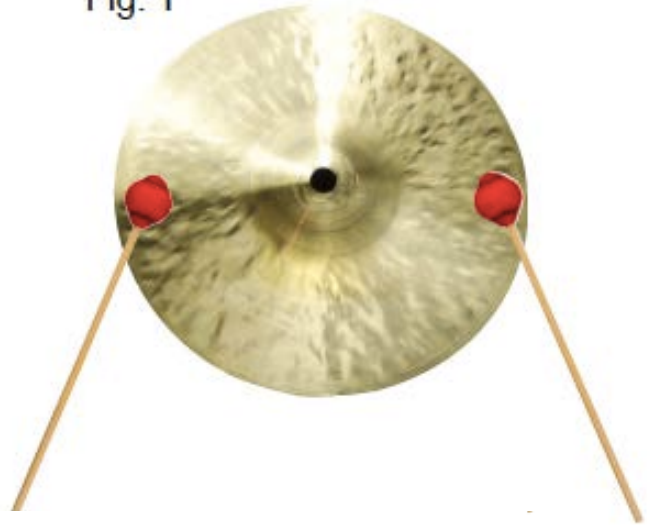
MALLET TYPE - Usually, a medium to soft yarn mallet is preferred, although experimenting with various weights and types of mallets is also necessary. A smaller cymbal will need a lighter mallet where as a large cymbal may need a heavier mallet. This is because a heavy mallet may overwhelm small diameter cymbals, 17" or smaller, and cause it to move erratically, making playing the cymbal difficult. Likewise, too light of a mallet may not allow a large cymbal to vibrate at its full potential.

MALLET HEIGHT - Height contributes greatly to volume, therefore mallet height must be carefully maintained or manipulated, especially during a crescendo. Beginning a crescendo softly, with a low mallet height, and ending loudly, with greater height, is the general rule. However, the speed at which the mallet gains height is important, too. Mallet height should steadily increase, duplicating the wedge shape of the crescendo, rather than all-at-once near the release.

ROLL SPEED - Stroke speed also contributes to volume as well as the intensity and smoothness of the cymbal's sound. The larger the instrument the slower the stroke speed, similar to rolling on a 32" versus a 20" timpano. Choose a speed that allows the cymbal to sound sustained, while feeling relaxed. Choosing strokes that are too fast for your technique will result in tension and lack of control; this is especially common. Roll speed, like stroke height, should be carefully manipulated to achieve greater intensity and volume.

PLAYING AREA & STROKE - The playing area for the cymbal is located approximately half an inch from the edge, with the R and L mallets placed opposite of each other; see figure 1 below. The stroke must be a legato or rebound stroke, and will feel very similar to the stroke on a marimba bar; the absence of true rebound means using more wrist and following through in a natural way. The final right and left stroke should always come off of the cymbal, very similar to the release of a roll on timpani. Because the release of a cymbal roll commonly coincides with a sound that is still vibrating, your release should usually avoid sudden movement or leaving the mallets in the down position. •

Fig. 1



** Use an alternated sticking for each of the exercises below. Also, experiment with a variety of tempos for exercise 4, as well as the etude, remembering to execute note values that best create a smooth and sustained sound.

Ex. 1

$\text{♩} = 110$

mf

3

5

Ex. 2

$\text{♩} = 110$

p *f*

5

Ex. 3

$\text{♩} = 110$

p *f* *p* *f*

5 6

Ex. 4

$\text{♩} = 110$

p *f* *p* *f*

ETUDE

** After measure 3, use comparable note values/stroke speed for the rolls indicated in order to achieve sustain and smoothness.

$\text{♩} = 110$

$\frac{4}{4}$

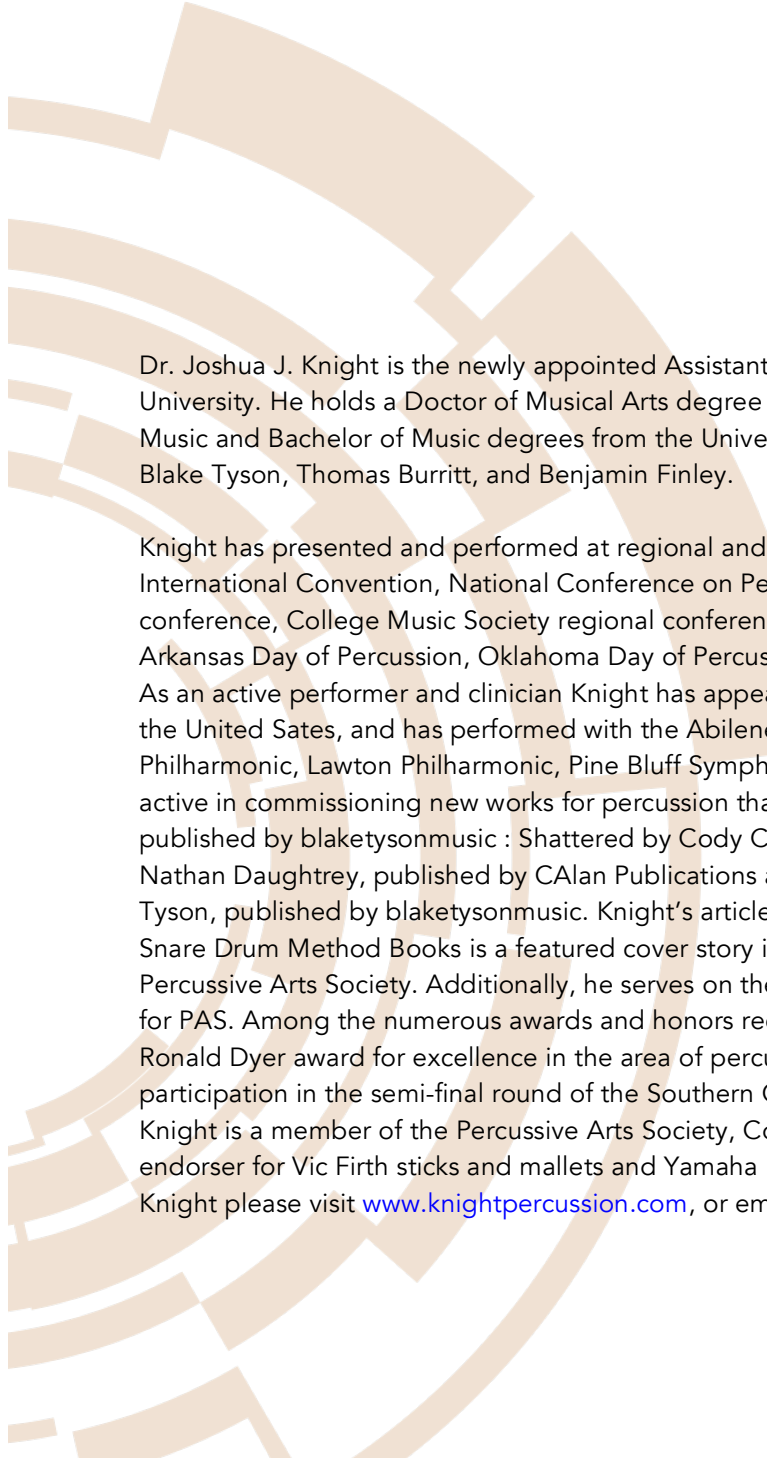

pp *f* *pp* *<*

5

mp *ff* *mf*

10

pp *ff* *p* *pp*



Dr. Joshua J. Knight is the newly appointed Assistant Professor of Percussion at Missouri Western State University. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Oklahoma, and earned his Master of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees from the University of Central Arkansas. His teachers include Lance Drege, Blake Tyson, Thomas Burritt, and Benjamin Finley.

Knight has presented and performed at regional and international events such as the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy, Texas Music Educators Association conference, College Music Society regional conference, and numerous state percussion festivals including the Arkansas Day of Percussion, Oklahoma Day of Percussion, and University of Central Arkansas Percussion Festival. As an active performer and clinician Knight has appeared at numerous high schools and universities throughout the United States, and has performed with the Abilene Philharmonic, Fort Smith Symphony, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Lawton Philharmonic, Pine Bluff Symphony, and Conway Symphony orchestras. Knight is also active in commissioning new works for percussion that include *Inside The Shining Stone* by Blake Tyson, published by blaketysonmusic; *Shattered* by Cody Criswell, published by C-Alan Publications; *Halcyon Days* by Nathan Daughtrey, published by C-Alan Publications and most recently, *The Wind That Turns The World* by Blake Tyson, published by blaketysonmusic. Knight's article, *Trends and Developments Through Thirty Prominent Snare Drum Method Books* is a featured cover story in *Percussive Notes*, the official research journal of the Percussive Arts Society. Additionally, he serves on the Education Committee and Ed Companion Subcommittee for PAS. Among the numerous awards and honors received throughout his career, the most current include the Ronald Dyer award for excellence in the area of percussion awarded by the University of Oklahoma in 2008 and participation in the semi-final round of the Southern California International Marimba Competition in 2009. Knight is a member of the Percussive Arts Society, College Music Society, TMEA, MMEA, and is an artist endorser for Vic Firth sticks and mallets and Yamaha percussion instruments. For more information about Dr. Knight please visit www.knightpercussion.com, or email joshknight2@gmail.com.