



ACCESSORY PERCUSSION FUNDAMENTALS: CRASH CYMBALS, PART ONE

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Photography assistance by Darci Wright

The following information marks the beginning of a series of articles on the main accessory percussion instruments commonly found in band and orchestral literature: cymbals, tambourine, and triangle. As we move further into the 21st century, percussionists continue to explore various pedagogical approaches to these instruments as seen with the creation of - *Complementary Percussion* by Keith Aleo and *Percussion Accessories* by Todd Meehan (Liquidrum). While these resources make for a wonderful addition to one's library, this publication series is aimed at fundamental sound production and should be seen as a reference in creating appropriate and consistent sounds on each instrument.

Tying Crash Cymbal Straps

Tying straps can often leave a person frustrated and, if done incorrectly, with a lethal projectile during their next rehearsal. Having personally seen the latter during a recent junior high rehearsal, I thought it necessary to discuss my method for tying cymbal straps.

First, take both leather straps and reverse them so that the coarse or unfinished leather hide is on the inside of the player's hand. I do this because most percussionists' hands sweat during performance and sweat plus smooth leather can sometimes lead to the previously mentioned projectile incident.

Second, take one strap and group the four split-ends together in preparation for forcing them through the opening in the dome. Then, pull the split-ends through the opening on the dome until they are evenly spaced on the inside of the cymbal. The player's side should look like the image below.



Lay the four straps separately against the inside of the cymbal, making a large plus sign (+).



Third, we must interlace these straps together to create a tight and secure knot. Take one of the arms of our newly formed plus sign and fold it on top of the one immediately to the right or left. This should create a small "t."



Now take the arm underneath the folded one and fold it over the next arm to the left or right.



You should have the two T-shaped folds with two extended arms remaining. Now complete the last two folds until all four arms have been folded and tucked.



At this stage having a friend could save you time, but is not necessary. (Side note: friends are awesome.) Option 1: The Friendless Way. To complete the tying, pull on two adjacent arms creating one half of the final knot and then repeat the process with the other two arms. This cycle continues until the strap is secure, pulling on the outside loop and keeping the knot in place underneath the dome. Option 2: With A Friend. In a similar fashion, have your friend pull two adjacent straps while you pull the other two. Continue until the strap is secure.



The Grip

The key to producing consistent sounds on any instrument is control. I begin by holding the strap the same way as I would when creating a fulcrum with a snare drum stick. I hold the strap between the thumb and the first joint of the index finger using this imagery: if you were to put a needle through your thumbnail, it would go through the nail, through the strap, and into the first joint of the index finger.



Please note: some players position themselves so that the dome of the cymbal is laying against the side of the thumb, but I find that I have more control over the instrument (less wiggle room) if the nail is facing into the dome.



Crashing

There are over a dozen ways to crash cymbals, all of which are appropriate, and there is no substitute for consulting recordings by the world's top performers, such as Frank Epstein (Boston Symphony Orchestra), Cynthia Yeh or Patsy Dash (Chicago Symphony Orchestra), and Chris Lamb (New York Philharmonic). For this series, I will focus on three distinct cymbal crashes that I have found to be the most common in our repertoire: cadential, repeaters, and soft crashes. Before I dive into these three specifically, in this article let's discuss the mechanics in creating one isolated crash.

The goal is to replicate the motion of a flam so that the soon-to-be-trapped air between the two cymbals can escape. Please note that the flam will not be heard as a literal flam when the velocity of the impact increases. The sound will in fact be a "crash."

Now that we know what to listen for, let's create a flam. First, the grip must be matched in both hands, keeping the cymbals parallel to your body and perpendicular to the floor. Then pull the cymbals a few inches away from your body to leave room for the crash motion to occur.



Second, we leave your non-dominant hand stationary and angle your dominant hand 35-45 degrees away from the other. Place the tip of this angle about 1-2 inches down the inside of the non-dominant cymbal to give room for shifting during impact.



Third, leave the non-dominant hand stationary and move the other about 5-7 inches, horizontally, away from the other. Making sure to keep the angle and the dominant hand approximately 1-2 inches down the inside of the other cymbal.



You can now crash the dominant cymbal hand into the other. Think about performing this act as you would if you were a monkey alarm clock cymbal player. I'm sure you have seen one of these. The only differences are that one cymbal is angled and you are only crashing once. Also, try to avoid the "slicing up or down" motion after crashing. You have you commit to this crash and see it all the way through. We termed it "crash cymbals" and not "light, slicing cymbals" for a reason. A crash is a violent affair and the only way for a true mezzo forte or forte sound to occur. It is a bit jarring at first, but after a few dozen attempts you will find the right about of force needed for you and your students.

To better assist you as you practice, please note these additional concepts:

- Relax your fingers right after you crash.
- Keep the flam angle.
- Use a mirror.
- Have a relaxed but grounded stance.
- Larger cymbals will need a wider angle.
- Wear ear plugs and practice in a large space.

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