



CONCERT BASS DRUM FUNDAMENTALS

Joshua J. Knight

Mallets - Mallet selection is essential to creating the perfect bass drum sound for every musical moment. Generally, the available mallets should include: 1. General, 2. Large/Heavy, 3. Staccato, 4. Rollers. A wide range of mallet sizes and weights, as well softness and hardness are available from various manufacturers and are clearly labeled and described in most catalogs.

Grip – The mallet grip has much to do with how the instrument sounds as well as the ease with which rhythms are executed. This grip is identical to the grip used for legato/rebound strokes on a snare drum; a relatively loose grip incorporating all of the fingers, thumb on the side, that allows the mallet to rebound off of the drum head in a natural way. *see images below.

Set-up - The performer should be situated behind, not beside, the bass drum. This position will allow the performer to reach both the front and back heads for dampening. A good visual reference for correct placement is the performer's feet. Place the left foot just between the two casters, or legs, on the bass drum stand. This position will also naturally place the mallet parallel to the drum head, allowing for the most optimal point on the mallet head to contact the drum head. *see images below.

Stroke - The stroke predominantly used is the legato/rebound stroke. This loose and natural stroke motion will create a full and consistent tone. Stroke motions should generally connect to one another. This continuous movement will not only get the large mallet head away from the drum so that it can vibrate freely, but also create physical repetition that will aid in executing accurate and even rhythms.

Tone - Various timbres are possible on the bass drum. The range of possible timbres can easily be explored by simply playing very near the rim, then slowly working your way to the center of the drum.

Playing Areas - After experimenting with tone production, the relationship to various playing areas on the head becomes clear. Here are the basic playing areas used to create standard tones required in band and orchestra literature. See images below.

1. Center
2. Off-Center
3. Edge
4. Rolls

Muffling – The bass drum should *only* be muffled if a rest is indicated, note length in the ensemble or style of repertoire requires it, or if the conductor asks for it. For example, the style of a Sousa march may require the performer to muffle the drum in the rests, rather than while striking the drum, so that the tones are full but articulate. Muffling can be accomplished a number of ways, from the use of the knee, hand, arm, etc., but it is most easily accomplished with the hand in an open position, utilizing the palm, fingers, and thumb (see third image below). Furthermore, holding a soft object in the hand, such as a towel, will prevent any unwanted sounds that result from bare skin vibrating on the drum head.

Rolls - Because of the angle of the bass drum, the use of a traditional left hand grip makes rolls easier; matched grip can be used, however, and will produce the same results as long as the performer maintains the appropriate mallet angle in relation to the drum head. Rolls should be executed as even single-strokes with the RH and LH placed at specific spots, generally the 12:00 and 6:00 positions. Softer dynamic rolls should be played closer to the edge (approximately 5 inches from the hoop), and louder dynamics slightly further toward the center. If playing a crescendo or decrescendo, gradually move from one playing area to the other. See fourth image below for *pp* to *mf* rolls.



Ex. 1 – Full/Long Tones: Off-center playing spot, full legato stroke, continuous motion connecting attacks.

♩=120

Bass Drum || ○ ————— | ○ ————— | ○ ————— | ○ ————— ||

Ex. 2 – Full/Muffled Notes(marches): Off-center playing spot, legato stroke with more grip pressure, muffling with left hand. *All four measures below are executed the same. Measures 1-2 exhibit the timing of the left hand muffling.

♩=120

Bass Drum

Ex. 3 – Rolls: Use playing areas 5 inches from the hoop, at 12:00 and 6:00 positions. Move slightly closer to the center at loud dynamic. * The first and third measures represent a notated roll, and should be the approximate sing-stroke speed of the preceding rolls.

♩=120

Bass Drum

p

6

6

6

6

3

f

5

5

5

5

Ex. 4 – Combining Techniques: A combination of techniques should be used to execute the following material. Soft rolls, muffled quarter notes, full notes at various dynamics, decrescendo/ crescendo rolls, and muffling in rests.

♩=120

Bass Drum

p

f

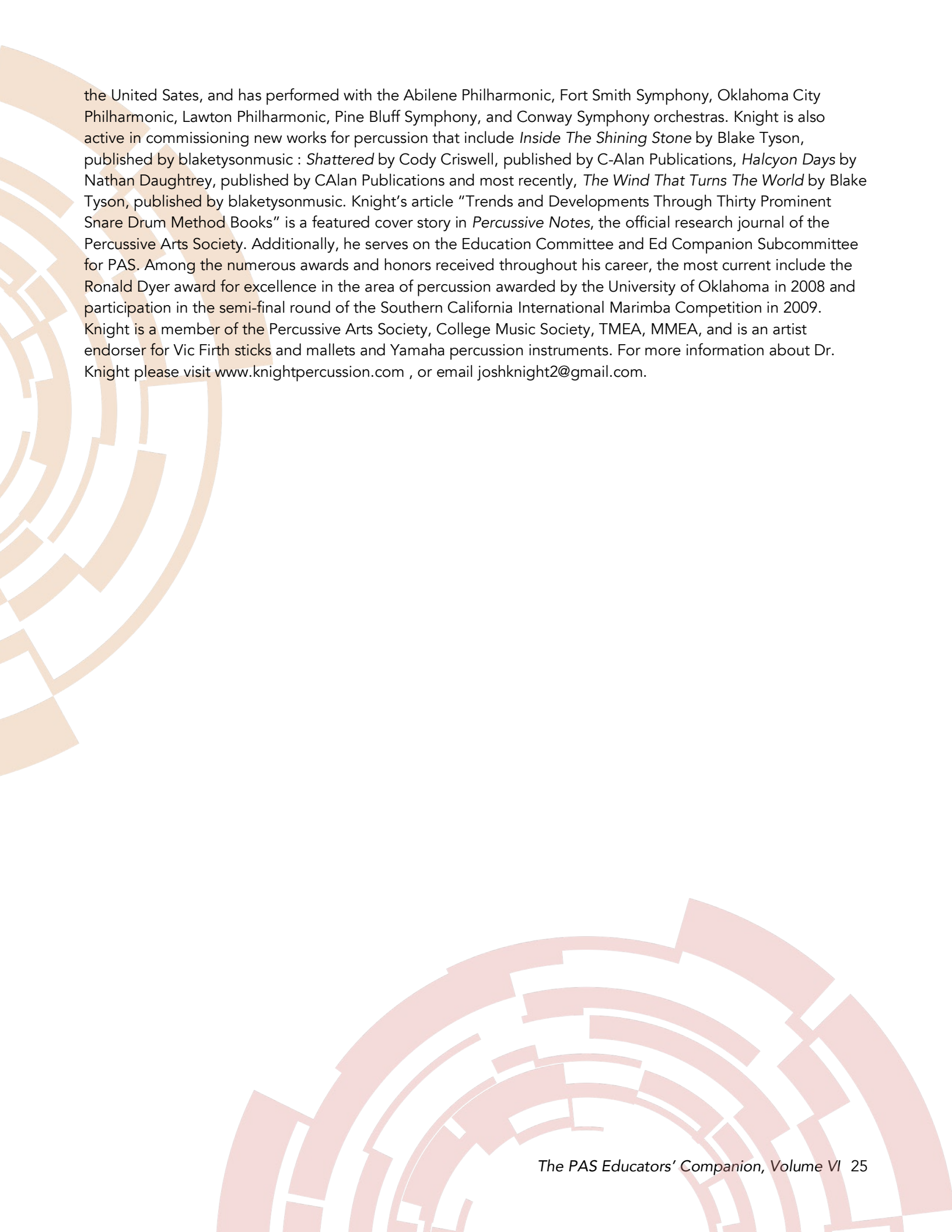
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pp

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Dr. Joshua J. Knight is 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.