

# INCORPORATING PERCUSSION FUNDAMENTALS IN FULL BAND REHEARSAL

by Steve Graves

A frustrating challenge of many non-percussionist band directors is how to keep their percussionists involved in rehearsal. This pedagogical issue can also quickly become a classroom management issue. My goal here is to provide band directors with strategies and resources to help keep their percussionists involved and engaged during warm-up time and rehearsal of literature (in both established and beginning ensembles).

## WARM UP/TECHNIQUE TIME STRATEGIES

### Preparation

Are your percussionists set up to be involved? Do they know what you're going to be working on ahead of time? Remember, your percussionists must do more than just open the case and take out their instrument. They are often asked to set up and perform on multiple instruments that utilize a variety of implements, and we don't want our rehearsal to come to a grinding halt while waiting for a student to go and find the instrument they need in the middle of rehearsal! Start by putting the list of pieces to be rehearsed on the board every day – your students will get in the habit of looking at that first when they walk into the rehearsal hall. You might even put a small white board back by the percussion section where they can have their own daily list.

### Routines

Establish within your percussion section a daily routine of equipment set-up that includes everything they'll need for warmups and literature for the day. Create lists, if needed, for set-up and tear-down responsibilities. I suggest that you take time to go over routines and expectations with the percussionists. For efficiency, do this outside of rehearsal time: before school (with donuts is better!), at lunch, or after school (again, snacks help). It is imperative that every student knows

AUG. 28	
<b>WIND ENS</b>	<b>ADV BAND</b>
Long tones 2 & 3, Slurs 2	Long tones 1 & 2, Slurs 1
Bb maj - rhythm pattern	Bb maj - rhythm pattern
Eb - interval study	Eb - whole note pattern
F tuning	F tuning
Announcements	Announcements
March - up to trio only	Tempest
Moscow 1941	m.1 - 17
Intro only (no perc set up)	

DAILY PERCUSSION ASSIGNMENTS				
TITLE:	TEMPEST	BELL CANYON MARCH	LARGO	DAILY SET UP
PLAYER:				
JOHN W.	SHAKE	BELLS	SUS CYM.	SHAKE & CYMBALS
ABBY J.	TIMPANI	SHAKE PERUM	VIBES/BELLS	TIMPANI
JAVIER E.	BASS PERUM	CRASH CYM.	TIMPANI	BASS PERUM & ACCESSORIES
ARMAD A.	MALLET 1	BASS PERUM	TRIANGLE PBL BELLS	KEYBOARDS

every job; use a percussion assignment chart to leave no question as to who should move what and where each piece of equipment belongs. Even with these individual roles, always insist that the section is responsible for the entire section's equipment.

## Planning

When planning your rehearsals, consider the following: What do you need to do with the winds in their warm-up/ technique sequence? What elements might also apply to percussion? How can the percussion section help the rest of the ensemble? The percussionists can play a key role in rehearsal fundamentals by providing pulse and subdividing the beat for the ensemble. This can help develop the skill of listening for pulse as an ensemble, while also allowing you to get off of the podium! (By the way, your band doesn't need you to be a drum major in order for them to play warm-ups). You may also find it helpful with beginners to use the keyboards to provide a pitch center for buzzing.

## Evaluate Needs

Think about what your percussionists need help with. Is it stick technique, new rhythms, mallet technique/mallet reading (these are always two different concerns), or ear training and timpani technique? Rather than just having them playing to "keep time," try to always include a musical goal such as working on a rhythm pattern that's in the music to be rehearsed, or slowly developing a new rudiment. Below are some examples of how roll rudiments can be developed during slur exercises for the winds:

Do you need supplemental material for your percussionists? It's really easy to add a page or more of "warm-up patterns" for both snare drum or mallets, and feel free to vary patterns and instrumentation to suit your needs.

Try adapting the percussion tempo to meet the winds needs. For example, if you decide that you'd like the winds to play their long tones for 8 or 16 counts, rather than your usual 4, teaching your percussion section to play their technique/rudiment lines in half time (half tempo) or double time (twice the tempo) and/or adapting the number of repetitions to match will help you gain flexibility in rehearsal without stopping to explain what you'd like them to do.

For instance, with winds doubling the note values shown at 80bpm, the percussionists would play the same tempo, but repeat the first 6 measures and double the last one.

**LONG TONES 1**

This is especially helpful to achieve the most comfortable tempos for roll exercises.

Once you've established your routine, add one player on bass drum (but not always the same one - rotate players, one each day, or every other line, etc.) and have them play the major subdivisions of the beat, or a rhythm pattern that you're working on. You can also vary note lengths so they can practice dampening.



## Tuning

During tuning time, don't use keyboards when matching winds or using the tuner, for a few reasons: one, some keyboards are tuned to A=441 or 442, and two, the pulsing of rolls and timbre can interfere with others hearing the "beats" while tuning. DO have your timpanist for the day work to match your concert Bb or F tuning.

## What You See Is What You Get

Percussion is "WYSIWYG." Your percussion section balance will improve greatly if you utilize a system of heights for volume. Everyone can then see when they are playing the correct dynamic. To start, use a basic 3 heights for beginners.



## REHEARSAL STRATEGIES

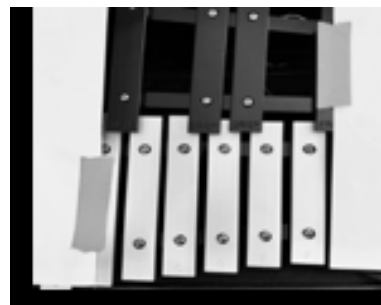
As stated initially, your preparation is crucial, but so is your consistency. Stick to the list that you posted prior to rehearsal. Don't list 3 pieces, then only work on the first one. If you find there are only 6 minutes left in rehearsal and you decide to move on to another piece, that's probably a good time to focus on the winds and let the percussion section (or at least some of them) start packing up.

If you're only going to work on a specific section of a piece, check that the percussionists are only setting up what they need for that particular section. If there are percussionists who don't play on the music you're working on, consider having them double another player's part. Three players on tambourine? Sure! Four on triangle? Why not? Consider that each of your percussionists may only have the opportunity to play each accessory instrument once or twice in a year, if that, so any extra opportunity to play an instrument in a musical context is really helpful!

Starting beginners in a homogeneous setting can be tricky enough, and I suggest that when first introducing air/embouchure/mouthpiece exercises, keep the percussionists on pads. Grip & stick control is equal to tone for percussionists, and these concepts must be developed first. Every tonguing and breathing exercise should be accompanied by stick work on pads – don't leave them out!

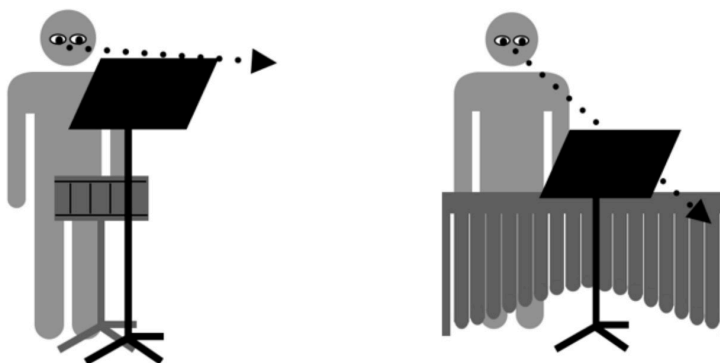
Introduce mallets soon thereafter, as new notes are introduced in your method, or as you introduce them by rote to the winds. Beginning percussionists seem to do better on mallets when following the winds' guided practice on new notes, and playing melodic exercises.

I've had better experiences with ALL of the percussionists playing the same thing – all on pads or all on mallets – so you are only commenting on one aspect of playing. (On mallets, it's almost always note recognition, rather than technique, that is the biggest challenge.) Keep in mind that a beginning mallet percussionist has every possible note in front of them, rather than only the 3 – 6 notes that they've been introduced to. Try limiting their choices by blocking off the notes that are out of their current range. A piece of paper and blue painter's tape works well.



***Beginner kit blocked off***

Keep music stands for snare drum/practice pads *high* (in the line of sight from eyes to music to conductor) and music stands for keyboard instruments *low* and slightly away (in the line of sight from eyes to keys to music) to facilitate better confidence while reading.



## Inclusion

It is sometimes helpful to start with the percussion section, particularly if they have a strongly subdivided part in the beginning of the section you're working on. Have the winds finger, sizzle, sing, or buzz along to establish pulse and articulations. Then add in each group of instruments.

When working a technical section with a section of winds (usually a tough fingering), always do it with percussion. If needed, you can reduce percussion volume by having them play on rims, use the back ends of keyboard mallets, dampen more, etc. Focus on lining up all of the sounds (clicking keys, valve noise, etc.) as one percussion section!

Tempo changes are often initiated or executed by the percussion section, so it's helpful to work these transitions with them first - if they don't get it right, it won't ever be right! Have the winds count the subdivisions while fingering their notes, or sizzling, while the percussionists play the transitions.

When the percussion section (or one player) has a particularly difficult part, put it up on the screen or board and teach it to everyone. Have wind players "become percussionists" and tap on thighs or tap their toes. Then everyone counts out the same part and learns together. The wind players can then evaluate the percussionists after a few tries, and will be able to relate their part to the percussion part better.

Many important percussion moments often get lost at the bottom of the page, so I suggest marking percussion cues at the top of the score, especially after long rests.

## LISTENING FOR TONE

Like string instruments and piano, 90% of tone is in their touch, so get your percussionists used to listening to their tone right from the start! Be picky about implement selection ("finding the right tool for the job" – much like reeds) and the proper striking spot. Have them listen for balance within their section, as well as within the band, right away. A fun exercise is to bring some of them up front to play and hear the winds from there. The skill of listening will be a lifetime skill as a drummer/percussionist/musician anywhere!

## AUTHOR BIO

**Steve Graves** is currently the band director at Lexington Junior High School, and has been teaching band in Southern California for 34 years. Part of the genesis of the percussion circuit scene in the area, he remains an active adjudicator and clinician for indoor percussion, marching, and concert bands, guest conducting honor groups, and is a regularly performing percussionist with local community bands and rock/pop groups as well. He received his undergraduate degree at California State University Long Beach, where he studied with Greg Goodall and Michael Carney, and has a master of arts in conducting from the American Band College.