

Playing the Cymbals

By Edoardo Albino Giachino

A pair of cymbals. It seems simple. It's just two bronze plates, with which you can't make sounds too fast, nor can you create very different tones. So why does playing this instrument in the orchestra excite us so much? Why is it so essential? Why is an audition often decided by the quality of the candidate's cymbal sound? Why is it so difficult to play softly and rhythmically? Why do I enjoy playing this instrument so much, and why have I invested so much time in it, still studying and experimenting with many things?

My heart beats fast when the tension in the music builds towards my cymbal crash, which explodes at the peak of the phrase. It's not me; I'm just a part of this unique, powerful, orderly, and exciting thing that is the orchestra, and at that moment, I'm captured by what we are all creating together. I only do one single, very powerful hit. But I have an enormous responsibility; everyone is watching me and expecting this earthquake, and I feel like a god. Is it a trivial part? Maybe, but it's fundamental, essential for delivering an emotion. Because our job as musicians is to give emotions to others and to our-

selves. To do this, it has to be perfect – the movement, the attack, the body of the sound, the timbre. On this, I have to work hard, deeply, never being too satisfied, and never feeling like I've arrived.

Studying the cymbals is strange; it has to be done in small doses because it requires great physical strength and causes wear on the skin of the hands that rubs against the leather straps. I can study for a few minutes, a few times a day. Therefore, concentration and continuous commitment become essential during the short time I have before my fingers start to hurt, my arms begin to tremble, my back suggests that I stop, and my abs are all marked by the cuts of fast stops.

It's such a physical instrument; I love that sound, as if the soul poured its vibrations through the bronze, the blood boils, the whole body clashes against these reverberations.

Art is an extremely serious thing, and music is a very serious thing. It doesn't depend on the difficulty it requires, but creating Art and creating Music with a capital "M" means taking nothing for granted, going deep, and believing in it.

The grip? Many think that control of the grip is given exclusively by the index, thumb, and middle fingers, but instead, I use the pinky and ring fingers a lot; they allow me to have a secure grip and a lot of strength. The movement? The speed? The pressure? How long should the cymbals stay together and vibrate together? Are



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there rules? Does it depend on the type of cymbal? Or on the type of hit? How do I manage to play so many fast and strong hits if I don't have the physical structure and training of Michael Rosen? How do I always have a satisfying hit? I want to talk to you about this in Indianapolis, but I don't want to teach you anything; I just want to talk to you about what I do, what I find useful, what I've discovered, how certain goals I thought I had reached later turned out to be surpassed, how I continually feel like a child discovering a sound or a way of playing that I didn't know.

How important is the quality of the instrument? We often underestimate this aspect. We play with violinists who play a Stradivarius, and often we settle for the cymbals we find in the orchestra. I found in the Zildjian company an ideal partner in the search for the sound I need – what the music I am playing requires, what my group of musicians demands. I have the opportunity to choose the cymbals I like, to create new ones, to modify some, and above all, to pair them in unexpected ways. Do we settle for playing cymbals that factory workers pair for us? Why? Habit? Laziness? I don't have my cymbals paired; I have many individual cymbals, and I pair them differently to obtain a new crash, a different sound, a special timbre.

Do you know "Fountains of Rome" by Respighi? The penultimate piece, "The Trevi Fountain at Noon," has four cymbal crashes, one *fff*, one *f*, one *p*, and one *pp*. Here, I love using a heavy 20-inch cymbal in my left hand that weighs about 2,700g, and in my right hand, I change four different cymbals. So I have the same basic timbre, but very different attacks, sounds, and dynamics to give a special sense of diminuendo and to try to make everything as exciting as possible.

What will I talk about in my clinic at PASIC 2024? About many things. I won't be able to say everything I want; time will run out, and I will still want to explain for hours the art of this instrument, so ancient and so simple.

Edoardo Albino Giachino is a member of the Orchestra Nazionale di Santa Cecilia of Rome and Professor of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. He has developed new performing techniques, makes videos, and his channel is followed in Europe, Asia and America. He wrote seven teaching manuals and various pieces of concert music for his students. He holds masterclasses worldwide, including at PASIC 2022. He is part of the orchestral project Utopia. Active in the field of contemporary music, he plays as a soloist and in chamber music ensembles, collaborating with many composers and performing national and international premieres. In 2015 he founded Takt-Time, a group of eclectic musicians offering pieces of Baroque, Romantic, rock, contemporary, folk, and urban music, giving life to a new sound experience created by the use of traditional and alternative instruments.

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SYMPHONIC

LAURA NOAH Symphonic Clinic Two Worlds: Marching and Orchestra and the Skills Between

This presentation will highlight how ensemble skills learned while performing in the marching arts directly relate to the skills used when performing in a symphony orchestra. Laura Noah will explore the physical and mental concepts geared toward the orchestral performer, such as timing, visual awareness, ensemble balance, character of sound, musical style, visualization, score study, and more. This presentation will aim to take a deep dive into Timing, Balance, and Character (TBC) and show how they are used to achieve quality performances in the marching arts and symphonic orchestra.

Laura Noah is the Principal Timpanist for the Mobile Symphony, Pensacola Symphony, Mississippi Gulf Coast Symphony, Meridian Symphony, Mobile Opera, and Pensacola Opera. Laura served as Alabama PAS Chapter President from 2021-24, is a current member of the PAS Symphonic Committee, and served as the Socioeconomic Point Person for the PAS Diversity Alliance from 2020-23. She is the Director of Percussion and Assistant Director of Athletic Bands at the University of West Florida. Laura also works with her husband, Sean, and the McGill-Toolen Catholic High School Band program as the instructor and arranger for the McT Band Front Ensemble. Laura holds a Master of Music degree in Percussion Performance from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. She earned a Bachelor of Music degree in Percussion Performance from the University of Alabama. Additionally, she attended the Aspen Music Festival and School and was a 1999 DCI Champion Santa Clara Vanguard front ensemble member.