

Principal Percussion Duties

By Josh Jones

For many percussionists, higher education is a necessity to their growth as professionals. Consistent private lessons, ensemble experience, and classroom courses such as theory and music business are just some examples of what many colleges offer. However, the majority of graduates often find themselves in situations that

were not covered in their respective programs, leaving them feeling unprepared. Courses on how to do taxes as a freelancer or resume building may not be available, even though the majority of professionals would deem them as essential skills. One such topic that is rarely covered thoroughly in percussion education is the role of a principal percussionist.

At first glance, the core duties of a principal percussionist look quite simple: assign music, hire subs, rent instruments, and create a setup chart. However, there are other tangential duties that are often assumed or not explicitly defined within them, requiring several different skill sets.

Organization, management, problem solving, and communication are examples of skills that are essential to a principal's success. Many of these skills may be covered separately among several courses, but employing them all within the structure of organizing a single orchestra program, let alone an entire season, may seem like a daunting task. In order to minimize that sensation, the principal must have a strategy that is effective and efficient in completing all the duties. This is achieved by developing and implementing systems and processes that can be utilized in any situation, with any orchestra they happen to perform with.

Before I began my tenure as principal of the Calgary Philharmonic, I sought guidance from several principal players on how

they approached the role and what they wished they knew in the beginning of their respective careers. They all at some point said the following: every principal basically does the same thing, but every orchestra is unique. Several would say some version of, "You'll find out what else you need to do as you go along," and they were correct.

The core duties at Calgary were apparent and I quickly was made aware of the tangential duties assigned to me. For example, I was asked to assign solely based on the order of the sub list, so that the "more important" parts would be given to the substitutes higher on the list. For me, this was a departure from what was recommended to me by principals I talked to, "but every orchestra is unique."

While this particular example is objectively small, depending on who you ask, idiosyncrasies like that and other variables can affect several aspects of a principal's duties. How soon substitutes are hired may affect how soon assignments are completed. At what point you are able to receive music from the librarian affects your ability to do assignments, hire subs, rent instruments, and draw the setup chart. You can see how much of a domino effect one delay in any point of the process creates.

Dealing with unexpected events, be they trivial or "catastrophic," is something that every principal, percussion or otherwise, has to learn to navigate within their role, and this is made easier the more



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streamlined their system is. If a principal does not have an effective way of communicating with the library, then anything having to do with the sheet music will become more difficult. If a principal does not have an efficient way of getting information to the personnel manager, then hiring substitutes becomes more difficult.

How do principals communicate with the multiple parties involved? How do they organize and distribute the vast amount of information needed for themselves and for others? Some stick solely to pen and paper for drawing setup charts while others use software to create models of the stage and the instruments. Some use Microsoft Word to write assignments down, while others use Excel. The differences in methods that you will see often are attributed to two things: how the principal receives information, and how a specific party received information. If a principal works best with using a pen and paper, but the personnel manager works best with email, then the principal will first do everything on paper, and either transfer it directly to email or, if their handwriting is clear enough, scan it. Knowing how everyone communicates is extremely important in ensuring a seamless process.

Throughout my time in Calgary I went from having multiple email threads for each individual duty, to developing an Excel sheet that contained the majority of information in those emails. This helped me have a clearer view of what was happening on a broader scale, and it gave some of my colleagues another avenue of communication. These adjustments were gradual, collaborative, and the final iteration, along with the process itself, was a major factor in being awarded tenure.

I continued using this system in my subsequent orchestra positions, Grant Park being the most recent, and its efficacy and efficiency still holds up. Had I started my first job using this system, I certainly would have avoided many unnecessary emails, headaches and moments of feeling overwhelmed.

It's my sincere hope that by presenting the system itself and informing aspiring

principals of what to look out for at this year's PASIC, they will have a better experience and be best set up for success.

Josh Jones began his formal studies in percussion with the Percussion Scholarship Program under the direction of Chicago Symphony member Patricia Dash and Chicago Lyric Opera member Douglas

Waddell. He earned his bachelor's degree in music from the DePaul School of Music and was the orchestra fellow of both the Detroit and Pittsburgh symphonies. In 2020, Josh joined the Kansas City Symphony as Principal Percussionist. Josh authored a percussion method book series, *Spatial Studies for Hitting Things*, and writes musical and philosophical blogs on his website, drummojo.com. **PN**

DRUMSET

ELENA BONOMO Drumset Clinic Musical Theater Drumming: A Creative Approach to Reading

From the rehearsal studio to the Broadway stage, Elena will present a masterclass on how to approach reading different types of charts as a working drummer. She'll share her experiences as a Broadway drummer and guide you through the exciting world of drumming for musical theater, orchestras and beyond. Learn essential tips and tricks for interpreting different types of charts, and develop your sight reading skills in order to be able to say yes to every gig that comes your way.

Elena Bonomo is a drummer, percussionist, and music educator. A graduate of Berklee College of Music, she holds a bachelor's degree in Performance. Elena currently holds the drum chair for Broadway's Tony-award-winning musical *SIX*. Actively involved in the pop/rock and musical theater scenes, Elena strives to create fluidity across all musical genres. Elena has appeared on *Late Night with Seth Meyers* as a featured drummer with the *8G Band*. She is a member of the Broadway *Sinfonietta* — an all-female and majority women of color orchestra — with whom she records and performs. Elena has shared the stage with such artists as Jordin Sparks, Lea Michele, Norm Lewis, LaChanze, Abby Mueller, Keri René Fuller, Dylan Mulvaney, and Patina Miller. Elena has performed in the Caribbean, South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe while working as a bandleader for Holland America Cruise Lines. Elena held the drum chair for the 1st National Tour of the musical *Waitress*. She originated the drum book for two Off-Broadway shows including *The Hello Girls* and *A Strange Loop*, which won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. An active sub in the NYC Theater scene, her credits include *Be More Chill*, *Cagney*, *For Colored Girls*, and *A Taste of Things to Come*.

DAVID CHIVERTON Drumset Clinic The Art of Versatility

This session will expound on the essence of being authentically efficient in various genres of music. The ability to stylistically and intentionally execute multiple genres of music at any moment will increase your value and demand as a musician. David will discuss everything from drum tones to "touch" and "feel." He will perform a cross-blend of genres such as Gospel, jazz, fusion and pop.

David Chiverton is a Miami native who grew up surrounded by Gospel music and musicians. By age 12, he was featured on a Gospel project titled *Jesus Is the Real Thing* by The Miami Music Workshop Choir. From then, he became the full-time drummer for Cooper Temple COGIC. He attended Miami Northwestern Senior High, where he became a member of the marching band and the jazz ensemble. He was offered a full academic scholarship to Florida International University and a position with the university's big band, which performed with such artists as Arturo Sandoval, Ingrid Jensen, and Nicole Henry. While in college, David linked up with producer Bigg D, where he was the featured drummer every Wednesday night at Miami L.I.V.E. at Santos Miami, where he shared the stage with such artists as John Legend and Lil Wayne. David received his bachelor's degree in Jazz Performance in 2010. He is currently touring and recording with various artists and has been highlighted as one of South Florida's most sought-after musicians.