

Worksheets for the Win: Building Efficient Practice Routines

By W. Lee Vinson

Routine-based practicing is one of the most effective ways to stay organized and intentional in the practice room. “Worksheets for the Win” will present a systematic approach that breaks down musical material into small, repeatable patterns, organized into structured routines. The goal in our time together at PASIC50 is to help students and teachers become more productive and efficient by learning how to create their own customized practice patterns and worksheets.

The worksheets we will cover consist of five, ten, or twenty numbered patterns that are to be repeated for one to five minutes each. These time-based routines can be revisited daily or as needed, helping players track how much time and attention is being spent on specific skills, techniques, or instruments. Not only does this method address technical challenges, but it also offers space to experiment with musical ideas. And by assigning specific time limits, we maximize our focus and productivity.

For many years I found it useful to direct this approach specifically towards orchestral excerpts for the purpose of audition preparation. Over time I have tried to adapt it to a broader range of material including technical development, etudes and solo repertoire. This PASIC session

will focus on three core areas where this method is especially useful:

1. General Technique — examples: soft snare drum ruffs, tambourine fundamentals.

2. Orchestral Excerpts — examples: “Colas Breugnon” (xylophone), Tchaikovsky 4 (cymbals).

3. Etudes and Solo Repertoire — example: “Étude No. 1” from J. Delecluse’s *Douze Etudes*.

Taking the accompanying soft snare drum ruff exercise worksheet as an example, let’s describe briefly how to use it. In addition to your instrument, you will need a mirror, music stand, metronome, and stopwatch or timer of some kind.

Position a full-length mirror where you have a full view of your hands and upper body. Place the music low enough to allow full visibility of your instrument. Turn on your metronome to the desired tempo and start your stopwatch. Timing out each pattern is especially helpful in that it eliminates the need to count repetitions, leaving more headspace to focus on what you are seeing, feeling, and hearing as you play. In this case, the first six patterns on the page can be somewhat improvisatory. Twenty minutes later, your soft snare drum ornament will be better, and you’ve gotten in your soft snare drum work for the day.

At PASIC, we are also going to discuss how to create your own worksheets, something I constantly encourage my students to do. Identify what you want to work on, and start sketching out short patterns. In the case of intricate rhythms, break them into smaller, less complex pieces before reassembling them in context.

In snare drum music, I find it helpful to try removing or replacing grace notes or



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Now it's your turn; go create your own worksheets!