

The following clinic material was presented at the 2005 Percussive Arts Society International Convention, by myself and Alan Shinn, Professor of Percussion at Texas Tech University

PASIC 2005 TIMPANI FUNDAMENTALS **by Alan Shinn & Scott Harris**

Getting Started - What You Need To Know

Positioning the Timpani: Set the drums (left to right; low to high) so you can reach the proper playing spot simply by pivoting at the waist. Make sure the outside drums (32 and 23) are far enough away from you so you don't strike too close to the middle of the head. The proper beating spot is 1/3 of the way from the rim to the center of the drum.

Sitting or Standing: Depends on the person's height, the tuning changes involved and the musical passage (getting around the drums).

Pitch Ranges: A B-flat major chord in first inversion will give you the practical bottom note of each drum (D-F-Bb-D). Each drum should get a comfortable perfect fifth above the bottom note. Timpani parts are always written in the bass clef so you must be familiar with note names, where they are on the staff, and how they relate to the drums.

Grip: Fulcrum - Hold the mallet between your thumb and first joint of first finger. The fulcrum point should be where the mallet will rebound the most from a given drop.

German/American Grip: Similar to matched grip for snare drum.

French Grip: The thumbs are on top of the shaft and the palms face each another.

French grip can be more conducive to soft rolls and legato playing while German grip may be more conducive for heavy staccato playing BUT you can achieve these playing styles using both or either of the two grips.

Tuning/Ear Training

Ear training is essential and singing is the best way to develop good ears. Sing with the radio, in a choir or even in the shower. Learn to match pitches by playing a note on a piano, marimba, pitch pipe, or tuning fork and then singing that pitch using the syllable *La*. You can learn to sing intervals (the distance between two notes) by using songs that are familiar to you (i.e.: Here comes the bride = P4). Use your favorite songs and apply them to specific intervals.

Tuning a Pitch on the Timpani:

1. Lower the drum's pitch to its lowest note (heel position).
2. Find the pitch you want by using a sound source. Make sure the pitch is in your ear (head).
3. Strike (with a mallet) or flick (with your finger) the drum softly and increase the head tension by pushing the pedal down until you reach the desired pitch. It is sometimes good to go above, then below and finally to the pitch to truly find it.
4. Always tune low to high even when tuning down from a previous pitch. This will eliminate any slack in the head tension.
5. Since many times you have to change pitches during a performance, practice tuning with the radio or stereo on.

Pedaling: Practice major (and minor) scales on two drums by tuning one drum to the tonic (1st scale degree) and the other to the dominant (5th scale degree). In tempo, strike and gliss to the next pitch, and the next pitch, etc. Be sure that when you descend that you go down far enough. It's easy to play sharp on the way down. Now practice playing your scale with no glissandi. Using your muscle (kinesthetic) memory move your foot rapidly at the same time you strike the drum. Remember to always produce good sound and tone! Playing simple melodies (*I've Been Workin' on the Railroad*, *Lean On Me*,

America the Beautiful etc) on one or two drums is also a great way to develop pitch and pedal control.

Gauges: Tuning gauges are fine if you are the one who is setting them. Be advised that they will become inaccurate from day to day and even throughout a performance. They only put you in the ballpark and then your ear must be the final answer.

Performance Technique

Legato Stroke: A full and resonant sound. Use a relaxed motion with little or no fulcrum tension and let the mallet do the work. Be careful not to use too much velocity.

Staccato Stroke: A clearly defined articulate or pointed sound. Produced by tightening the fulcrum and fingers and using a quicker motion. More velocity = more volume. When time allows, change to harder mallets for ease of articulation.

Rolls: Timpani rolls are performed as single stroke rolls (like mallet percussion). The speed of the roll will be faster on the smaller drums or when the pitch is in the upper range of the drum. Evenness is always more important than speed. Always watch your playing spot making sure that both mallets are the same distance from the edge about six inches apart.

Dampening: Used to control duration. Dampening should be performed using the third, fourth and fifth fingers while holding the stick up in your hand by the index finger and thumb (fulcrum). To dampen, firmly touch the head of the drum (don't press) in the playing spot until the sound stops. Rolling the fingers helps to eliminate contact sound. If time allows, dampen every drum (even those not played recently) to compensate for sympathetic vibrations. If there is not sufficient time to dampen all drums, dampen the ones ringing the loudest (usually the most recently played). Listen to the ensemble to determine the correct length of note and use mutes on the drums not being played.

Sticking: Practice alternate sticking when possible to develop an equal ability with each hand. When moving from drum to drum one should lead up with the right and down with the left. After developing a natural alternating approach you should also work on shifting, crossing and doubling. You should try and achieve equal results from all three in order to have more tools in the shed. Always take the time to find your best sticking and then mark your music.

Recommended Method Books for the Young Timpanist

Fundamental Method for Timpani by Mitchell Peters published by Alfred

Primary Handbook for Timpani by Garwood Whaley published by Meredith Music

Exercises, Etudes and Solos by Raynor Carroll published by Batterie Music

Pedaling



29... 26... 29...

Legato/staccato



Rolls - start w/ left as well



R R R R R R R R R R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R R R R R R R R R

Dampening

