

## **“Developing Mallet Reading Proficiency for the Young/Intermediate Percussionist.”**

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### **1. Mallet percussion inherent challenges for the teacher and student.**

- ❖ School teacher percussion lesson schedule, and balancing snare studies.
- ❖ Instruments at home for practice.
- ❖ Band room—having enough mallet instruments.
- ❖ Non-contact instrument
- ❖ Vision aspects. Where to look.
- ❖ Mallet handles create kinesthetic distancing.
- ❖ Instrument can be long (L-R) creating distance issues.
- ❖ Music positioning in relation to the music, stand, and instrument
- ❖ Peripheral vision versus taking direct aim visually at the instrument
- ❖ Size of the keys. (Larger/Small) (Graduated/Non-Graduated).
- ❖ Method books: whole notes versus quarter note/half note melodies. (discourages reading and encourages memorization.)
- ❖ Developing memorization skills versus improving reading ability.
- ❖ Method books for mallets often start in C major...one of the hardest keys for mallets! Some progress way too fast.

### **2. Solutions**

- ❖ Balancing the amount of time in a lesson on both mallets and snare studies.
- ❖ Every student should have an instrument at home...bell kit, school instrument, etc.
- ❖ Read like the wind and brass players...in all rehearsals!
  - Have students read in all warm-up exercises and chorales at the beginning of rehearsals.
  - Students should rotate percussion assignments at all levels so they learn to become percussionists, not just drummers. Match parts to their ability levels.
  - Have them read other instruments parts on marimba/xylo/bells...ie. oboe, double other mallet parts, write out a trombone part in treble Clef, etc...no one should ever not have a part.
  - Students should not share music stands, and keep the music near the bars.
  - Beginning students can learn most rhythms that they would learn on snare drum on the bells first. Start with bells, introduce snare later on. This sets the tone that they are musicians and readers first! Mallets are of prime importance!
- ❖ Enlarge the music. (Similar to beginning piano music)
- ❖ Create clear differences between staff lines. (ie. draw a solid line with marker or highlighter, hash marks, etc.)
- ❖ Avoid pages with many staves of music.
  - Photo, enlarge, cut in half, quarters
  - cover part of page w/other blank page.
- ❖ Choose music within a one octave range
- ❖ Stand position. Use a separate stand. Avoid bell kit stand.
  - center stand (L-R) above playing area
  - put stand low, or below “black keys”, to allow for better peripheral vision success.
- ❖ Play in small mallet ensembles: Develop the love of playing mallet instruments!

### **3. Beginning reading lessons**

- ❖ Start by **saying notes** not in rhythm and time out loud, without playing. Then do it in rhythm and time-still without playing.

- ❖ Then do the same while physically touching/tapping the notes with finger. Follow this by using mallets, but choke up around half way. Then use position.
- ❖ Sing notes during performance.
- ❖ Exercises should be just a few notes to start. Think of how we learn typing. “AAA, SSS, ASA, SAS, SSA” etc. Don’t jump into melodies right away.
- ❖ Avoid memorable/recognizable melodies. –or they will quickly memorize and stop reading.
- ❖ Work in other keys. Not just C major.
- ❖ Musictheory.net Free online note practice exercises....note recognition, also keyboard note recognition!

#### 4. Other Considerations

- ❖ Rolls-when
- ❖ How to fit bells and snare in a 30 minute lesson.
- ❖ Learn early drum lesson rhythms on bells.
- ❖ Scale work to train good even lines and phrases. Arpeggios, sequences, mini-scales, etc.
- ❖ Movement when playing larger mallet instruments
- ❖ Mallet selection
- ❖ Playing area on mallet instruments
- ❖ Instruments, bell kits, home xylophones or marimbas
- ❖ Vibraphone performance techniques-pedal, mallet dampening
- ❖ Four mallet grips- Musser vs. Cross (Traditional) vs. Leigh Howard Stevens vs. Burton
- ❖ How to practice four mallet chordal exercises effectively: practice transitions between chords by using 8<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> note rhythms on each chord...no rolling. Start with hands separate, then together.

#### 5. Resources:

- ❖ Method books:
  - Modern School for the Xylophone, Marimba and Vibraphone by Morris Goldenberg
  - Rubank Method for Bells
  - Mallet Percussion for Young Beginners, A Peripheral Vision Primer by Randy Eyles
  - Fundamental Studies for Mallets by Garwood Whaley
  - Primary Handbook for Mallets by Garwood Whaley
  - Musical Studies for the Intermediate Mallet Player by Garwood Whaley
  - Bach for Marimba, by James Moore
  - Method of Movement for Marimba, by Leigh Howard Stevens
  - Vibraphone Technique: Dampening and Pedaling by Dave Friedman
  - Fundamental Method for Mallets by Mitchell Peters
- ❖ Solos
  - Allegro from the Third Sonata for Violin by Handel (two mallet)
  - Concerto in a minor by JS Bach (two mallet)
  - Perpetual Commotion by Tom Brown
  - Presto from the Sonata in G minor by Bach (two mallet)
  - Raggedy Ragtime Rags arranged by Randall Eyles
  - Yellow After the Rain-Mitchell Peters (four mallet)
  - Sea Refractions by Mitchell Peters
  - Rain Dance- Alice Gomez (four mallet)
  - Etude in C major by Claire Musser (four mallet)
  - Flight of the Bumblebee- two mallet
  - Tambourin Chinois by Fritz Kreisler, arr. by Green
  - Michi by Keiko Abe (four mallet)
  - Dream of the Cherry Blossoms by Keiko Abe (four mallet)

#### 6. Websites: Musictheory.net, Vicfirth.com, PAS.org, LarryDubill.com