

TEACHING TECHNIQUES

for the

PERCUSSIONS

by Robert Buggert

PREFACE

The study of percussion instruments and the teaching of percussion instruments pose a vast number of problems and there are variant ideas relating to their solutions. These problems are two-fold: technical and musical. Although related, the problems will be treated to some extent separately.

Teachers of instrumental music readily admit that the percussion section is one of the weakest in the band or orchestra. In addition, probably due to lack of information, this section often receives the least amount of attention. Many teachers enter the professional field of instrumental-music teaching with little or no knowledge of percussion teaching techniques. A recent study by Michael B. Lamade indicates that some colleges offer no percussion instruction, fifty-seven percent have no programs for the percussionist in music education, and sixty-seven percent of the schools surveyed have no specialist teacher in the area of percussion.¹ Part of this problem, therefore, stems from an inadequacy in many teacher training institutions. A second phase of the problem is that very few percussionists have been inclined toward the field of college teaching. Most colleges and universities do not have enough percussion students to require the full-time services of a percussionist hence the college percussion instructor must be able to teach either theory, music literature, music education, or assist with ensembles. As a result, knowledge of percussion techniques is lacking and there is confusion as well as misunderstanding.

¹ M. B. Lamade, "Teacher-training in percussion; an analysis of the percussion instruction offered by colleges and universities," *The Instrumentalist*, XII, (March, 1958), p. 74.

After many years of experience with young students, college students, (both percussion majors and those studying percussion as a secondary medium), and music educators, the writer believes a handbook will offer solutions to many of the problems, make percussion teaching better as well as more efficient, and help clarify various phases of percussion performance and pedagogy.

This book is presented with a sincere desire to improve teaching techniques and develop better attitudes toward music in general and percussion playing specifically.

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Example 2. Sitting position



Holding the right stick: Among professional players, there are some differences in the grip used for holding the right stick. I should like to mention three concepts.

The right stick may be held with the forefinger and the thumb approximately three and one-half inches from the butt end of the stick.

Example 3. Right grip: forefinger and thumb



Seven single strokes

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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

Nine single strokes

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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

Following, the student should play non-alternating groups of four, six, and eight strokes. These should be learned starting with the right and starting with the left.

Example 16. Non-alternating single strokes

Four non-alternating single strokes

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

L R L R L R L R

also R L R L R L R L

Six non-alternating single strokes

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6

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

also R L R L R L R L R L R L

Eight non-alternating single strokes

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

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

also R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

These form the basis for other measured rolls. Once the student can manipulate these various patterns with some ease and some sense of security, he is ready to add the rebounds and other types of single strokes.

The rebounds: After learning the single strokes mentioned in the patterns above, the drummer is ready to add the rebound to the single stroke. It is suggested that, for the sake of evenness, all patterns be executed with no accent. This produces an even roll and eventually the student might accent either the beginning or the end or the center of the roll, whichever is necessary. After these rolls are learned, the long roll may be studied.

The flams: After learning the rolls the student is usually advanced enough in technique to begin flams. The flam, because of its demanding physical coordination, is one of the most difficult rudiments to play well. In addition, a student often plays flams well when playing them as a rudiment but plays them poorly in application.

A good method for teaching the flam is to have the student play both sticks together and then gradually raise one while keeping the other one in place. If this process is followed correctly, the result should be one stick playing later and slightly stronger while the other stick will play earlier and softer. It is usually easiest to begin with both sticks together and gradually raise the right. This is the right flam. One important consideration from a physical standpoint is to place both sticks into motion simultaneously; the action of the stick playing the grace note is not a separate action from that of the stick playing the principal note. After the right flam is played with some ease, the next necessary step, naturally, is to begin the left flam. One should be careful and be certain that the right flam and the left flam are individually well performed before allowing the student to proceed with alternating flams. At this point the student has control of the single stroke, control of the rebound, and control of flams. The learning of the remainder of the rudiments is dependent upon combinations of various adaptations of these three fundamental techniques.

Example 17a. Right flam



Example 17b. Right flam position



Example 18a. Left flam



Example 18b. Left flam position



Example 19. Alternating flams



THE THIRTEEN STANDARD RUDIMENTS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RUDIMENTAL DRUMMERS

Some years ago a group of well-known percussionists organized the National Association of Rudimental Drummers. This body set up twenty-six rudiments as specific patterns essential for learning to play snare drum. These patterns were divided into two groups with the first thirteen being called the "Thirteen Essential Rudiments." They are as follows:

1. The long roll
2. The five stroke roll
3. The seven stroke roll
4. The flam
5. The flam accent
6. The flam paradiddle
7. The flamacue
8. The ruff
9. The single-drag
10. The double-drag
11. The double paradiddle
12. The single ratamacue
13. The triple ratamacue

These rudiments play an important role in the development of the techniques of snare drumming. Discussion of each rudiment follows with some suggestions for teaching.

The long roll: The long roll is an excellent device for helping the advanced student play and execute rolls with greater perfection and better efficiency. It seems unwise, however, to use the long roll as a teaching device for the beginning snare drummer as he will be discouraged by attempting such a difficult hurdle in the early stage. It is the writer's suggestion that the roll be taught first by playing even single strokes with the use of the second basic rudiment, the rebound mentioned in chapter one. Once the student can play even single strokes and then execute them with the rebound, he might be ready (after approximately a few months) to start practicing the long roll. The long roll is two beats with each stick starting slowly and gradually accelerating until the individual notes lose their identity and meld into a sustained sound. Once the actual roll is achieved, it is then ritarded until it reaches its original state. This is called opening and closing the long roll.

Example 20. The long roll

Example 20. The long roll

L L R R etc. gradually faster

gradually slower

The five stroke roll: Before attempting the five stroke roll as a rudiment the drummer should be able to play three single strokes evenly and add the rebounds.

Example 21. Three single strokes and rebounds.

Singles

Rest Rest etc.

Rebounds

Rest Rest etc.

L L R R L R R L L R

After this device is learned, the drummer may attempt the five stroke roll as a rudiment starting slowly and gradually accelerating as with the long roll. For rudimental purposes this roll is usually played with a slight accent on the end. Drummers should learn the roll, however, first unaccented and then eventually be able to accent either the beginning or the end. Avoid any unmusical, overdone accent.

Example 22. The five stroke roll

L L R R L R R L L R etc. gradually faster

gradually slower

The principles applied to teaching the seven stroke roll are the same as those for the five using, however, four single strokes rather than three as the basis.

Example 23. Four single strokes and rebounds.

Singles

Rest etc.

Rebounds

Rest etc.

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

Played as a rudiment the roll slightly crescendos and has an accent on the end. Avoid over-accenting.

Example 24. The seven stroke roll

L L R R L L R L L R R L L R etc.

gradually faster gradually slower

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND THIRTEEN AND ADDITIONAL RUDIMENTS

THE SECOND THIRTEEN RUDIMENTS

As previously stated, the twenty-six rudiments were divided into two groups with the first thirteen being called the "Thirteen Essential Rudiments". The second group of rudiments, or the second thirteen are as follows:

14. The single stroke roll
15. The nine stroke roll
16. The ten stroke roll
17. The eleven stroke roll
18. The thirteen stroke roll
19. The fifteen stroke roll
20. The flam tap
21. The single paradiddle
22. The drag paradiddle number one
23. The drag paradiddle number two
24. The flam paradiddle-diddle
25. Lesson twenty-five
26. The double ratamacue

These also play a major role in the development of the technique of the snare drummer. Occasionally, however, one may be misled by the classification of rudiments because several, especially the rolls, which are indicated in the second half of the twenty-six are actually more important and used more than some of the thirteen so-called essential rudiments such as the double drag and the single drag, to mention a few. Discussion of the second thirteen rudiments follows with some suggestions for teaching each rudiment.

The single stroke roll: The drummer using the alternating stroke-tap combination has already performed, in an elementary sense, the single stroke roll. The single stroke roll as a rudiment starts slowly and gradually accelerates, never sounding, however, like the long roll because rebounds are not used. Once the player reaches a peak of acceleration the roll is slowed down to the original tempo. The development of the single stroke roll depends upon three factors: 1) control, 2) technique, and 3) relaxation. The performance of a fast single stroke roll and the development of these three characteristics come directly from practice. The following two ideas are helpful in preparing for the single stroke roll: 1) right stick alone—begin slowly, accelerate, and return to the original tempo, and 2) left stick alone—begin slowly, accelerate, and return to the original tempo.

Example 40. The single stroke roll—begin slowly, accelerate, and return to the original tempo.

The musical notation consists of two staves, both in bass clef. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: L R L R L R L R, followed by a roll (indicated by a 'to' and a dense cluster of notes), and then another 'to' and a final note. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: L R L R L R L R.

The single stroke roll reaches a barrier past which the player is unable to go without tension. This tension must be eliminated; therefore, the drummer should practice slowly and accelerate until this point is reached. Once it is reached, the player may go slightly slower and practice at that speed for some length of time (maybe five minutes or ten minutes every day for a week); the acceleration should begin again. Usually this barrier will appear at a faster point of speed. It does one little good to keep practicing beyond this point of tension because tension will hamper the roll and cause it to be uncontrolled and uneven. One must give careful attention to evenness and be certain that the right and left sticks are played absolutely the same throughout the roll.

The nine stroke roll: The nine stroke roll, as a rudiment, starts slowly, accelerates, and returns to the original tempo. In addition, there is a slight accent on the end.

Example 41. Five singles and rebound.

Singles

Rebounds

L R L R L R L R L R

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

A feasible plan for teaching this basic roll is to have the student play five even single strokes and add rebounds with the exception of the last stroke.

Example 42. Nine stroke roll

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

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

The nine stroke roll for the beginning student is best played with no accent.

The ten stroke roll: The ten stroke roll is a rarely used traditional roll and is unique in that it is played with two accents. The ten stroke roll may be derived from six even beats. The rebounds are added to the first four of these as in the nine stroke roll but the fifth and sixth notes are played without rebound and accented.

Example 77c. $\frac{6}{8}$ time

R R L R L R R L R L R

The flamacue must be applied musically. The accents should not be overdone.

The ruff: The ruff as a rudiment is usually played quite open in style and is played "hand-to-hand". It may be applied various ways. A question which usually is posed concerns the amount of time the ruff should take; the answer to this is difficult. The degree of openness or the extent of closedness depends primarily upon the volume and the style of the music being performed. As a general rule, the more military or the louder the percussionist is playing, the more open is the ruff; the less military, more orchestral and more delicate, the more closed is the rudiment. It is best applied in a one-hand manner rather than in an alternating or "hand-to-hand" manner. Professional application of the ruff is very seldom done in an alternating manner. A march which has the following drum part, for example, would be best played as indicated.

Example 78. Ruff in context

LL R LL R LL R LL R

The single drag: When applied the single drag might be associated with various rhythms.

Example 79a. Most common usage

R R L L R R—R RL LR RL

Example 79b. A $\frac{6}{8}$ variation

R R L L R

Example 79c. A $\frac{2}{4}$ rhythmic change

R R L L R
or L R R L L

The correct rhythm must always be maintained. It is rarely used in concert performance; it is used frequently in traditional playing, rudimental solos, and recently has become a favorite for marching band street beats.

The double drag: The double drag, usually applied in $\frac{6}{8}$ time, in two variant manners.

Example 80a. Most frequent

R R L L R

Example 80b. A variation

R R L L R

Similar to the single drag, the correct rhythm must be maintained. It is also rarely used in concert performance but more frequently in traditional playing and rudimental solos, and, to some extent, in street beats.

The double paradiddle: In application the double paradiddle is usually used in $\frac{6}{8}$ time or in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. It may be applied using either one or two accents.

Occasionally it is applied to triplet rhythm.

Example 81a. One accent

R — RLRLRR LRLRLL R L — LRLRLL R

Example 81b. Two accents

R — RLRLRR LRLRLL R L — LRLRLL R

Example 81c. Triplets

R — R L R L RLRLRR LRLRLL L

Example 112. Playing near the rim

Andante

mf

Example 113. Playing near the center

Allegro

f

Example 114. Playing in the center

ff > *sffz* *sffz* *sffz* *sffz* *sffz* *sffz* *sffz*

The following example shows a variance in the bass drum technique and the notes here would be played in different places as indicated.

Example 115. Variance in the playing "spots"

12"----- to ----- 6" ----- Center

cresc.----- *f* *sffz* *sffz*

Most everyone with experience in music can recall the sound of a string bass playing pizzicato. The bass drum certainly cannot produce the sound of a string bass, neither can it produce the same quality nor the exact pitches; however, one is a better bass drummer if he tries diligently to imitate this quality. This quality is particularly desirable when playing rhythmical passages. If the drum is struck constantly the same way or at the same spot the sound becomes monotonous, unmusical and uninteresting. When playing rhythmical passages and particularly the type of passages which are frequent in marches it is wise to occasionally change the bass drum playing spot. The following eight measures represent a typical bass drum part. Below it is a typical bass part for the same

The bass drum as a rhythmical instrument: When the bass drum part is primarily one of rhythmic support, extreme care must be taken so the sound coincides with what is being played by the ensemble and at no time becomes overbearing or monotonous. The bass drummer can make the part quite interesting by a careful use of accents and also by using various contrasts in tone color.

The bass drum as a dynamic instrument: In addition to being used for rhythm, the bass drum is used often in the band and orchestra for dynamic or dramatic effects. Many times these parts might be and actually should be more prominent than when the part indicates rhythm only. Bass drum parts in compositions as "Finlandia", "1812 Overture", etc., should be played with dramatic effect and although they should never be overbearing and unmusical, they should not be subdued. Often in the performance of these types of parts a roll is called for on the bass drum. The bass drummer should not roll with a double end beater but should use a pair of timpani sticks and execute a single stroke roll. Rolls are usually played about twelve inches from the center.

Example 118. Bass drum roll with timpani sticks



Conclusions: The bass drum must be treated as a musical instrument, the parts must be considered an integral part of the over-all ensemble and the most important aspect of bass drum techniques is the sound, its effect, and its relation to the total musical picture.

CYMBAL TECHNIQUES

In the band and orchestra cymbals are used in three different ways: 1) separate cymbals, 2) cymbals attached to the bass drum, and 3) suspended cymbals.

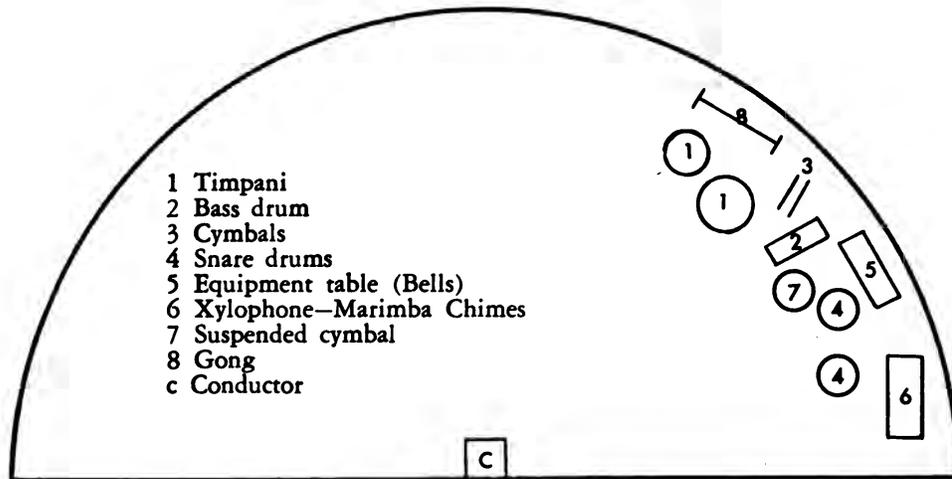
Cymbal technique is difficult to discuss without actual demonstration. Many players tend to start with the cymbals far apart and bring them together in a rather forceful manner creating an unmusical crash. Cymbal playing is a compromise between extreme glancing blows and straight blows. Both extremes are wrong. Neither one produces a desirable tone. As a compromise, the cymbals should be struck in an arc-like manner. Cymbal playing depends on the way in which the cymbals are brought apart as well as the way in which they are brought together. To produce the crash, the player should start with the cymbals together and rock them sideways.

Example 121. "Swishing" the cymbals

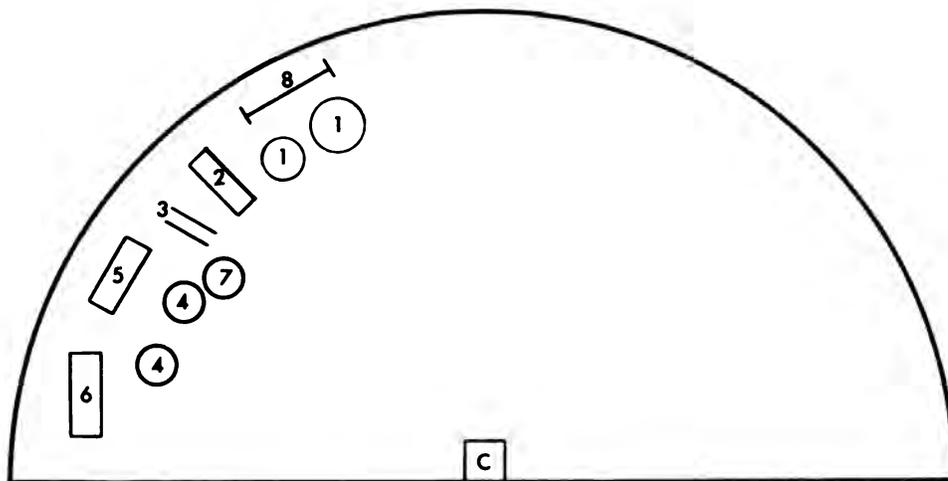


This produces a strange "swishing" sound. There is no definite crash while this is being done; however, while performing this arc-like stroke the player should relax and at a comfortable time bring the cymbals apart. Several attempts at this will reveal that a fine tone may eventually come forth. The cymbal player must then practice to produce this tone without the preparatory arc-like motion. A good quality of tone is produced by starting with the cymbals fairly close together, striking them in an arc-like manner and bring them apart. A good crash cannot be produced if the player starts with the cymbals far apart. The following examples show the three positions for a cymbal crash.

Example 124a. To the right of the conductor



Example 124b. To the left of the conductor



Personnel: The number of personnel in the section may vary with the type of music being performed. In professional organizations, much of the performance can be done by four people:—one playing bass drum, one playing cymbals, one playing snare drum and accessories and a fourth playing timpani and mallet instruments. However, many times it is necessary to use five or six percussionists. In high schools the most common number of persons in the percussion section would probably be five: one person playing bass drum, one playing cymbals, two persons playing snare drum and accessories, and one person playing timpani and mallet instruments. Occasionally six persons might be used in the section but usually more than six persons in the section cause some confusion.

The distribution of responsibility: There must be some organization within the section. The leader of the section or the director of the organization should assign specific parts to certain players for certain compositions. This does not mean that one player must always play the same instrument. Conversely, it is desirable to have some variation and develop versatility, but once a composition is being prepared for a concert, the players should always play the same instrument in this composition. Once the part is assigned, write the name of the player on the part, indicating which instrument(s) or section(s) are his responsibility. The assignments may vary from composition to composition and from concert to concert.

Maintenance of equipment: All percussion instruments should have either cases, covers or a cabinet in which they may be kept when not in use. Percussion instruments should be stored in rooms which are not subjected to extremes in temperature or humidity; it is also good if there are no drastic climatic changes. Moving parts such as tuning rod, snare strainers, pedals, etc. should be kept lubricated. Heads and snares should not be loosened when not in use unless the drums are being stored under undesirable conditions. Instruments should be kept away from student traffic.

THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SECTION

In general, the section will be no better than the sum of its parts. The following, if carefully observed, will be valuable aids to the development of an efficient, alert, musical percussion section:

Attitude: The attitudes of the director, parent and student all play a valuable role in the teaching of percussion. The basic aims of music education must not be overlooked nor neglected.

Technique: Technique is important for without it the student cannot produce music. There are various methods, grips, approaches, etc. to the development of technique. The teacher must select those which are best for him and then, for the sake of the student, teach with a strong sense of logic and a high degree of consistency.

The rudiments form a basic foundation for the development of technique but the performance of the rudiments without sensible application is of little value.

Musicianship: The ultimate in performance is the answer to the question, "How should it sound?" Technique should not dominate musicianship.

Versatility: Percussionists should be taught to be familiar with all the instruments of the section.

Summation: It is the sum of good attitude, excellent technique, tasteful musicianship and versatility which brings about successful percussionists. These achievements are the result of better percussion teaching techniques.