

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

ADVANCED YOUNG PLAYER SERIES



# MALLETS

JOHN POLLARD  
CLINICIAN

52ND ANNUAL CLINIC  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS  
1999

## FORWARD

The Texas Bandmasters Association is dedicated to providing its membership opportunities for quality professional growth. After much success with the Beginner and Intermediate Series, TBA is sponsoring a series on advanced middle school and junior high school teaching methods. This series addresses the needs of the third year band students. Our clinicians are chosen from the ranks of superior music educators in our state. They also represent a wide diversity in geographic location as well as school size and setting.

This year, clinics are scheduled for flute , oboe, Bb clarinet, trumpet, F horn, and mallet percussion. These sessions will be presented with a companion booklet. In each handout, you will find teaching methods, and classroom organizational skills which are useful in today's schools.

We appreciate the extra effort of the clinicians who prepared these clinics and booklets. In addition we acknowledge Jim Hagood, TBA Past President, whose initiative began the series, as well as Bob Brandenberger, Mike Olsen and Bob Parsons who have worked so hard to continue the series.

This series is respectfully dedicated to the many band directors, past and present, who have built a historical music education program in Texas and have worked so hard to make our student's experience in band music such an outstanding one.

Charlotte Royall, Texas Bandmasters Association

## JOHN POLLARD

John Pollard is a band director at L.D. Bell High School and instructs percussion at Hurst and Bedford Junior Highs in the Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District, located between Dallas and Fort Worth. His students have received numerous honors in concert and marching percussion, including recognition at the Percussive Arts Society's national individual and ensemble competitions. Mr. Pollard is a Yamaha Corporation of America Clinician, a member of the Vic Firth Education Committee and an endorser with the Avedis Zildjian Company. Organizations he has instructed have given presentations for the Music Educators National Conference, Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmasters Association, Washington Music Educators Association and Percussive Arts Society. Mr. Pollard is an instructor with Yamaha's Sounds of Summer and Bands Of America Express camps. He is a member of the SFA-Yamaha Percussion Symposium faculty and is serving on the PASIC 2000 Planning Committee.

# Texas Bandmasters Association

---

## Advanced Series

### Mallet Percussion - John Pollard

John Pollard is a band director at L.D. Bell High School and instructs percussion at Hurst and Bedford Junior Highs in the Hurst-Eules-Bedford Independent School District, located between Dallas and Fort Worth. His students have received numerous honors in concert and marching percussion, including recognition at the Percussive Arts Society's national individual and ensemble competitions. Mr. Pollard is a Yamaha Corporation of America Clinician, a member of the Vic Firth Education Committee and an endorser with the Avedis Zildjian Company. Organizations he has instructed have given presentations for the Music Educators National Conference, Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmasters Association, Washington Music Educators Association and Percussive Arts Society. Mr. Pollard is an instructor with Yamaha Sounds of Summer and Bands Of America Express camps. He is a member of the SFA-Yamaha Percussion Symposium faculty and is serving on the PASIC 2000 Planning Committee.

Percussionists reaching high school typically fall into one of two categories; mallet proficient or mallet deficient. The proficient ones have invested time necessary to develop beginning and intermediate ability. Now they are ready to take on more challenging exercises, 4-mallet technique and advanced sight reading. Those who are mallet "deficient" have neglected making mallet practice part of their routine. In some cases they have forgotten the fundamentals and may even have lost the ability to read notes. Predictably, these students develop an active dislike for mallet playing which only compounds their predicament.

This clinic and handout will attempt to present strategies for keeping percussionists comfortable with mallet playing from the beginning year through 12th grade. This material is intended to help all mallet players improve, regardless of ability level. Advanced two mallet exercises, sightreading, four mallet technique and solo development will be discussed. Finally, this clinic will present the band director with logical guidelines for mallet selection and suggestions to increase the visibility and appeal of mallet instruments.

### REVIEW OF BEGINNING AND INTERMEDIATE CONCEPTS

Glenn Fugett and Lamar Burkhalter gave excellent beginning and intermediate mallet percussion clinics in this instructional series. The material is at [www.txband.com/bmallethtm](http://www.txband.com/bmallethtm) and [www.txband.com/intmallet.htm](http://www.txband.com/intmallet.htm) I highly recommend a review of their valuable presentations.

- Grip:** The mallet should be held firmly with thumb and forefinger opposite each other. Always keep the other fingers on the mallet.
- Stroke:** "Legato" stroke. Prep by lifting the wrist. Strike the bar with a relaxed hand and wrist while immediately lifting the mallet back to its original position. A slight movement in the forearm will also occur. It should feel as if the mallet bounces off the bar. Avoid downstroking into the bar.
- Striking Areas:** Natural keys should be struck in the center. Sharp/flat keys should be struck in the center or on the edge nearest the player. Avoid striking on the nodes, the dead areas where the string runs through the bar.
- Rolls:** Produce smooth and connected single strokes. Avoid thinking it must be fast because it is a "roll." Speed varies depending on the size of the bar, especially on low xylophone and middle to low marimba. As with timpani, the lower the note the slower the roll. This is necessary to create optimum resonance. Reinforce the idea of slower, bigger strokes with minimal attack and full release.

- Stickings: Use double stickings when necessary to avoid awkward crossing of the hands.
- Simple Reading: Vital to develop kinesthetic sense. Encourages vertical as well as horizontal reading skills. Begin with simple pieces at slow tempos.
- Also: Basic counting and note recognition.  
Familiarity with the instruments and necessary maintenance.  
Method Books.  
Execution and understanding of all 12 Major Scales and Chromatic Scale.  
Rehearsal coordination/integration.

## I. KEEPING PERCUSSIONISTS COMFORTABLE WITH MALLET PLAYING

### Acquired Mallet Deficiency Syndrome (“I don’t PLAY Bells!”)

Every school has its share of well-rounded percussionists who are proficient on mallet instruments, snare drum, timpani, drum set and accessories. Unfortunately many beginning percussionists seem to wind up as “drummers” by the time they reach high school: They forget scales and reading skills taught in the formative years. They avoid “bell duty” by marching with the battery in the fall and claiming drum parts for concerts in the winter and spring, leaving the mallet parts to the well-rounded students remaining. This “Acquired Mallet Deficiency Syndrome” can be avoided if students never stop playing every day on mallet instruments.

### A Philosophy: Beginning Year Through 12th Grade

Objective: Establish a warm up routine which allows percussionists to play both of their primary instruments (mallets and snare) every day -just as wind players are expected to do.

Sample warm up procedure: Students line up in a semi-circle. Half start on mallet instruments, the other half on practice pads. The metronome is turned on and they play completely through the warm up sequence; 12 major scale patterns for mallet players, 12 accompanying rudimental exercises for practice pads. This takes approximately 10 minutes (less as the tempo increases). After completing the sequence the players switch instruments and begin again. [ SEE MUSIC PACKET ]

My students learn this sequence as beginners and continue it through high school. For beginners; if one scale is learned each week the entire warm up is established by mid-November. (Please note: Rapid learning of scale patterns does not equal proficiency in reading - which must be taught separately).

#### Appeal for Instructors

1. In 20 minutes per day every student has completed all 12 major scales on keyboard and crucial rudimental fundamentals on practice pad.
2. Beginners gain command of the keyboard right away and never develop mallet “phobia.”
3. Once learned, this procedure becomes student-driven: They may run the process with a metronome and minimal supervision.
4. Timpani, Drum Set, World Percussion and Synthesizer parts can be added for variety.
5. When playing drum parts, the students listen in to the melodic line and play with more musicality.

#### Appeal for Students

1. Mallet exercises gain credibility by being attached to “cool” drum parts.
2. Students enjoy hearing mallet parts with drum parts and place equal weight on their importance.
3. Students will often play a “duet” with each other - one playing the mallet warm up, another the drum.

Extra Appeal: A sequenced accompaniment part may be taped for students to use at home. This serves as an attractive metronome.

The above procedure may not be practical in every situation, but it can be customized to meet your needs. Even if percussionists meet in class with other instruments, keyboard and corresponding practice pad exercises can be written to go along with the curriculum. At the high school level, playing this warm up sequence (or portions of it) even two or three times a week keeps students comfortable with mallet fundamentals. In any event, it is crucial to establish a routine - either with or separate from the band - which allows students to play both primary instruments as often as possible to assure continued growth.

♪ The bottom line... There is no substitute for time spent on the instrument.

## II. ADVANCED TWO MALLET EXERCISES

Once your percussionists have developed strong fundamentals and are comfortable with the keyboard, supplemental exercises should be introduced to further their technical skills. With some planning, appropriate marching season exercises from the keyboards in your pit can be introduced in concert season. These exercises should (a) serve the same technical purpose as the corresponding battery exercise or (b) provide accompaniment for battery techniques which are not used with mallets.

Start with the basics. Introduce exercises to develop stroke, double-stops (octaves), timing, **stickings** and velocity in diatonic and chromatic settings. Having percussionists play these exercises with half of the players starting on mallet instruments and half on practice pads (yes, even in high school) has the same benefits and appeal as noted in Section I.

### Exercises Which Serve The Same Technical Purpose as Battery Exercises [ SEE MUSIC PACKET ]

1. Primary legato exercises
  - “Single Beat A” (Single Hand), “Single Beat B” (Hands in Octaves)
  - “Double Beat”
  - “Triple Beat”
2. Controlled Rebound
  - “Accent-Tap”
3. Duple-Triple Timing
  - “Hup-Dup”
4. Sticking Study
  - “Diddles/Mobility”

### Exercises written to “Accompany” Battery Exercises [ SEE MUSIC PACKET ]

5. Diatonic/Chromatic Study in Sixteenths
  - “Hugga-Dugga-Burr” - Battery part consists of duple rolls.
6. Diatonic/Chromatic Scale Study in Triplets
  - “Trolls” - Battery part consists of triplet rolls
7. Advanced Scale Study in Sixteenths
  - “B K X” - Battery part is a flam study

Apparatus the fundamental scale/rudiment warm ups, a sequenced accompaniment part can be taped and given out to encourage extra practice.

### **Excellence With Two Mallets.**

Since mallet playing is largely kinesthetic, players and instructors are in the habit of “accepting” many note errors during the formative years. As a player’s feel for the instrument develops this casual acceptance needs to be defeated. Because mallet percussionists are not forced to deal with intonation, range limitations, water in the instrument, bad reeds, etc. I feel it is fair to expect greater note accuracy from experienced mallet players.

♪ The bottom line... There is no substitute for time spent on the instrument.

### III. SIGHTREADING

Unlike musicians who can feel their instrument in their hands, sightreading on mallet percussion is kinesthetic, as the mallets are an extension of the player's hands. The player must therefore develop a "blind" sense for where the bars are. This sense must be developed further for different instrument sizes and varying sizes of bars between octaves. Sightreading on mallets is one of the hardest things a percussionist must do, but it is essential in many student and professional situations.

Make sightreading part of your regular routine, even if you choose to do it one-on-one rather than in a classroom situation. Choose a method book or material at an appropriate level for the players. Insist that they keep their eyes on the page and don't allow them to stop when mistakes are made (with beginners I enlarge pages to 120% which makes them more comfortable • but only for the first half of the year).

It is sometimes necessary for students to glance at the keyboard during large skips, but the general rule is to never look down. Place the bottom of the music stand at the same level as the accidentals on the keyboard so that the player has a partial view of the instrument while reading.

#### Tell your percussionists

1. "Don't take your eyes off the music."
2. "Keep going even if mistakes are made."
3. "Look-ahead." (especially while playing simple parts, rests or long rolls)
4. "Look for logic in the music." (scale patterns, predictable interval skips and arpeggios).

Procedure: Use a metronome. Play through each piece only once. Do not repeat it unless there are more mistakes than correct notes. If this happens often then the literature they are attempting is too difficult or the tempo needs to be reduced.

Encourage players to read duets with other mallet players, flutists, oboists (who share music in C), other instruments, or with piano accompaniment. This will help prevent stopping when mistakes are made.

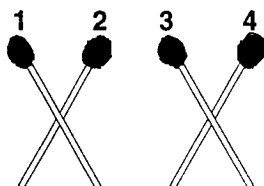
♪ The bottom line... There is no substitute for time spent on the instrument.

### IV. FOUR Mallet TECHNIQUE

Four mallet techniques may be learned incorrectly without supervision. I strongly believe these disciplines should be taught in a private setting with an accomplished instructor. With proper guidance students may begin with three and four mallets as soon as they have a working knowledge of the keyboard. It takes time to get comfortable with these techniques so the earlier the supervised start the better.

#### Grips

1. Cross Grip (Burton Grip): The handle of the outer mallet is crossed over the handle of the inner.



The third and fourth fingers hold the mallets at the crossing point (with an inch of mallet below the crosspoint). The thumb and first finger are between the mallets with the outside mallet touching the finger just below the top joint. The inner mallet touches the thumb at the base of the thumb nail. The thumb and first finger should be bent for smaller intervals and straightened out as the interval widens. The crossing of the mallets makes for increased striking power.

2. Traditional Four Mallet Grip: The inner mallets are held with the thumb and first finger. The outer mallets are held by the third and fourth fingers. The shafts of the mallet are crossed in the palm of the hand with the outside mallet shaft under the inside.
3. Musser Grip: The shafts of the mallet are held in different sections of the hand with the inside mallet being controlled by the thumb and fingers one and two, and the outside mallet being controlled with fingers three and four. The wrists are flat, or parallel with the ground. The mallets are not crossed and act with a great deal of independence.
4. Stevens Grip (a modern variation of Musser grip): Wrists are turned so that the thumbs are on top. The inner mallets are held by the heel of the thumb and first joint of the first finger. The outer mallets are held by the third and fourth fingers. As with Musser Grip the mallets are not crossed and act with a great deal of independence.

In all grips it is important, as in two mallet playing, that the mallets lift or “rebound” rapidly off the bar.

### Choosing: a Grip

I highly recommend Stevens Grip or Musser Grip for marimba. Cross Grip is typically used on vibraphone, where the accidentals and natural notes are on the same plane. I have found that Cross Grip is rapidly learned and teach it to players in my marching pit who are not “full-time” percussionists for the purpose of playing locked intervals with increased power. However, Cross Grip limits independence and has diminished range between inner and outer mallets. Much of today’s solo marimba literature may not be effectively played with Cross Grip because of these limitations. I believe that serious percussionists should learn Musser or Stevens Grip from an accomplished instructor and make it their primary four mallet technique.

### Common Faults

1. Too much pressure in one part of the hand, resulting in a lack of control (mallets tend to fly apart or together). If both parts of the hand are too tight, the hand and the resulting sound will be stiff.
2. Mallets held too high or too low on the handle.
3. Arms too high in the air, making the mallet approach the bar at a bad angle.
4. Mallets not rebounding off the bar.
5. Arm too stiff with too much arm motion, especially in rolls. Produces a hard, stiff sound.

### **Four Mallet Exercises [ SEE MUSIC PACKET ]**

1. Block Exercises: All four mallets together.
  - a. Diatonic, locked interval ▪ Start with 2 mallets in one hand, then 2 in the other, then 4 together.
  - b. Chromatic, locked interval ▪ Same as above.
  - c. Intervallic ▪ Same as above.
  - d. Chordal
 

Play each chord, no roll. Then roll each chord. Then roll chords connecting smoothly.  
Practice block rolls, independent rolls and ripple rolls.
2. Independence of the two hands (Variations of Block Exercises).
 

One hand may play two simultaneous notes while the other may play one or two notes.
3. Pivot Exercises (Use of two mallets in one hand independently).
 

In Cross Grip this is accomplished with a rocking motion. With Stevens Grip it is achieved through independence of the fingers, in addition to the rocking motion.

  - a. Mirroring hands.
  - b. Caterpillar variations.

4. One Mallet Melodic Playing (Use of one mallet while holding two).  
Exercises for this type of playing are easy to find. Practice scales, arpeggios, any melodic lines, etc. with each mallet while holding two in one hand.

Appualth other applications, a sequenced accompaniment encourages extra practice and serves as an attractive metronome.

♪ The bottom line... There is no substitute for time spent on the instrument.

## V. DEVELOPMENT AS A SOLOIST

Percussion performance is soloistic in nature. Each percussionist in concert band plays the same role as the piccolo or english horn player; one person on a part. It is crucial that percussionists develop solo technique on all instruments used in the curriculum (accessories included). This is especially true on mallet instruments, where an audible melodic line is produced. After all, observers may never realize the snare drummer missed some flams, but everyone will know when the xylo player fails to observe a key signature. In band class as you listen to wind players “down the row,” include mallet players who double those parts.

Solo contests are highly recommended for all percussionists. I suggest beginners learn 2 short pieces for their first contest; one on snare, one on mallet keyboard. In this important formative year it is good if they feel equally successful on both, and do not “box themselves in” to just one instrument. Choose selections which are simple enough that the player can command all of the details well ahead of the contest date and feel confident when performing in front of the judge.

As players gain ability, more challenging solos should be attempted, but keep the kinesthetic nature of the instrument in mind. Players should prepare literature they will have complete command of well ahead of the contest date, especially with regard to 4 mallet selections. “Nerves” (experienced at different levels per individual) can cause subtle interference with grip, kinesthetic sense and stroke technique. These natural physiological reactions may be countered or avoided by a high level of comfort and command of the solo.

When students experience earned success in solo endeavors it builds their confidence, encourages them to seek out new challenges and motivates them to practice toward new goals.

♪ The bottom line... There is no substitute for time spent on the instrument.

## VI. MALLET SELECTION

An entire clinic could be devoted to the discussion of mallet construction and proper selection. Many brands and types are available and simple selection can be difficult. Vic Firth has cut through the confusion by producing a practical “**Mallet Pack**” which is perfect as a starter kit. Below is a summary of head materials used in mallet construction and the model numbers of an advanced array of Yamaha keyboard mallets I prefer on each instrument.

### Unwound Mallets

Brass: Used on Glockenspiel when a bright, clear metallic tone is called for (usually specified in the score)

Lexan ® (soft plastic): Extremely hard plastic, good on glockenspiel and acoustalon xylophones.

Rosewood: Expressly for Xylophone. Produces a crisp, decisive tone.

**Hytrel** ® (soft plastic): Soft plastic, good for softer bell and medium xylo playing.

Rubber: Available in many different hardnesses. Good for xylophone (hard) as well as wood and temple blocks (medium), and sometimes for marimba or vibes (soft).

### Wound Mallets

Cord: Harder than yarn, cord wound heads produce a brighter, more articulate tone.

Yarn: Pleasingly mellow tone excellent for use on marimbas and vibraphone.

HANDLES ARE USUALLY AVAILABLE IN EITHER RATTAN (flexible), BIRCH (stiff) OR PLASTIC.



## Mallet Selection by Instrument

(Model numbers are from the YAMAHA "Keyboard Percussion Mallet" handout)

### Glockenspiel

Very Loud playing ( ff+ )  
Brass (MR-830)

Loud-medium playing ( f-mf )  
Lexan ® (MR-91 OL)

Soft (mp and below)  
Hytrel ® (MR-930)

### Xylophone (Acoustalon)

Loud playing ( f )  
Lexan ® or Rosewood (MR-900L)

Medium ( mf )  
Hytrel ®

Soft (mp and below)  
Medium Soft Rubber (MR-1130)

### Xylophone (Rosewood)

Loud playing ( f )  
Rosewood

Medium ( mf )  
Hytrel ®

Soft (mp and below)  
Medium Soft Rubber

### Vibraphone

Loud playing ( f )  
Hard Cord (MV-5010)

Medium ( mf )  
Medium Hard Cord (MV-5020)

Soft (mp and below)  
Medium Soft Cord (MV-5030)

### Marimba (Acoustalon or Rosewood - Up to 4.3 Octaves)

Loud playing ( f )  
Hard Yarn (MV-4010)

Medium ( mf )  
Medium Hard Yarn (MV-4020)

Soft (mp and below)  
Very Soft Yarn (MV-6050)

### Marimba (Rosewood 5 Octave - Specifically for Lower Octave)

Loud playing ( f )  
Medium Soft Yarn (MV-8040)

Medium ( mf )  
Very Soft Yarn (MV-8060)

Soft (mp and below)  
Extra Soft Yarn (MV-8080)

## Summary

For directors and students who may wish to purchase all of the above mallets.  
Mallets in BOLD are the first four pairs I recommend.

MR-830.. .....	Brass
<b>MR-91 OL.. .....</b>	<b>Lexan ®</b>
MR-900L.. .....	Rosewood
MR-930.. .....	Hytrel ®
<b>MR-1130 ....</b>	<b>Medium Soft Rubber</b>
MV-5010.. .....	Hard Cord
MV-5020 .....	<b>Medium Cord</b>
MV-5030 .....	Medium Soft Cord
MV-4010.. .....	Hard Yarn
MV-4020 .....	Medium Hard Yarn
MV-6050.. .....	Very Soft Yarn
MV-8040 .....	Bass Marimba, Med. Soft Yarn
MV-8060 .....	Bass Marimba, Very Soft Yarn
MV-8080 .....	Bass Marimba, Extra Soft Yarn

## CONCLUSION: CRITICAL THINKING

The bottom line for gaining proficiency is that “there is no substitute for time spent on the instrument.” With this in mind it is necessary for the director to provide percussionists with the opportunity to establish a daily routine covering each discipline at which they will be expected to excel.

Recently I wrote an article entitled “Keeping Percussionists Interested During Concert Season” which suggests strategies designed to include the percussion section more strongly in band warm ups and in music rehearsal, even when less parts than players exist. This article was published in the Winter 1999 **Vic Firth Education** Newsletter (Volume 2, Edition 3), and is available at this clinic, or at [www.vicfirth.com](http://www.vicfirth.com)

Finally, here are some miscellaneous suggestions you may choose to use to increase the visibility, appeal and success of mallet instruments within your program:

- Bring in a nationally known mallet keyboard artist for a concert.
- Bring in a university level percussion professor for a master class / demonstration.
- Feature a private lesson instructor or accomplished student on a band concert.
- Take students to see outside percussion concerts and DCI shows where they can observe the pits.
- Pass out melody lines to popular music and tape sequenced accompaniments (get permission first).
- Encourage solo development, duet reading, working with piano accompaniment, etc.
- Perform percussion ensemble literature which spotlights mallet players.
- Allow your students to “check out” large mallet instruments over weekends and holidays.
- Make marimba purchasing information available to parents of students (you might be surprised!).

The most important element is consistency. Developing percussionists need to play mallet keyboards every day. Students tend to practice what they are comfortable with at first. As they gain confidence and ability they seek out new challenges and eventually become self-motivated. It is up to the director to begin the process. Hopefully this handout has provided some information which will be helpful.

---

Many thanks to the Yamaha Corporation and Vic Firth, Incorporated for providing equipment and support for this clinic.

YAMAHA™

VIC  
FIRTH®

For more information on any of the material discussed, feel free to email me at [JPollard@aol.com](mailto:JPollard@aol.com)

For more information on the QY-70 Sequencer and Yamaha Percussion Products, visit [www.yamaha.com](http://www.yamaha.com) and [www.yamaha.com/band](http://www.yamaha.com/band)

For more information on the Vic Firth Mallet Pack and Vic Firth Products, visit [www.vicfirth.com](http://www.vicfirth.com)