

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

BEGINNER INSTRUCTION SERIES

"... STUFF THAT WORKS!"

MALLET

GLENN FUGETT
CLINICIAN

48TH ANNUAL CLINIC
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
1995

Foreword

Teachers unselfishly helping teachers in a fiercely competitive setting is a tradition as old as Texas' school bands. In that tradition, the Texas Bandmasters Association is sponsoring a series of clinics on beginning instrumental teaching methods, presented by some of Texas' premier music educators during the 1995 and 1996 TBA Conventions in San Antonio, Texas. These master teachers, chosen from the ranks of superior music educators in the State, represent a wide diversity in geographic location, as well as, in teaching situations.

A session will be presented on six band instruments each with a companion handout. In these handouts, you will find teaching methods, and classroom organizational skills which are used successfully in today's schools. These clinics represent some tried and true ways of teaching, along with fresh new ideas, all with one common denominator: this is *"STUFF THAT WORKS!"*

We acknowledge the efforts of the clinicians who prepared these booklets and, who also presented a clinic session. In addition we acknowledge the help and advice of Past TBA Bandmasters of the Year, Mel Montgomery, of Nacogdoches, and J.R. McEntyre, of Odessa. We also thank the many teachers from around the State who have shared their "secrets" for this project.

This series is respectfully dedicated to the legions of band directors who have gone before us and who have built the music education program that is unique in history: TEXAS' BANDS. Representing the best of this tradition was the 1990 President of TBA, the late Malcolm Helm, whose example and teaching inspired and challenged all of us.

Jim Hagood, President, Texas Bandmasters Association

GLENN FUGETT

Glenn Fugett, received his B.M. from The University of Akron where he studied with Dr. Larry Snider. He was a member or instructor with several drum and bugle corps throughout the country. From 1981 to 1986, Glenn was the percussion instructor with Field Local High School in Suffield, Ohio. From 1986 to 1991, he was the head middle school band director as well as the high school jazz band director and percussion instructor at the Calallen Independent School District in Corpus Christi. He is now a band director at Westlake High School in Austin. He is a faculty member at various Yamaha "Sounds of Summer" camps throughout the country. Glenn is a judge with Drum Corps Midwest and Drum Corps International. His organizational memberships include TMEA, TBA and the Percussive Arts Society.

BEGINNING MALLET PERCUSSION

Mallet playing is an important aspect of beginning percussion instruction that is often neglected. Each percussion student, in essence, is required to learn two major instruments and a variety of accessory instruments in the same year. Even with the ideal schedule and staff, this can be a very challenging undertaking. Moreover, with heterogeneous class groupings and lack of a percussion specialist instructing the class, this task can seem impossible. However, through careful planning and a daily routine, each student can receive the proper instruction. This handout will outline a successful routine as well as many important aspects of beginner mallet percussion instruction.

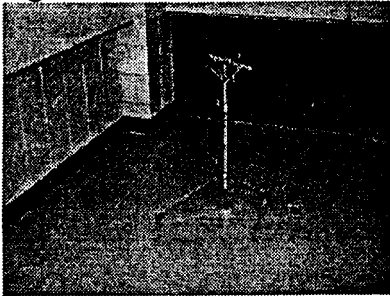
CHOOSING AN INSTRUMENT

Instrument selection is very important to the success of the mallet percussionist. Generally, a percussion kit is recommended. This usually contains a bell set, pad, stand that fits both, mallets, sticks, music stand and case. I highly recommend requiring the students to purchase a metronome when buying the kit. If the metronome is placed on your band's recommended instrument list, the students will have it for their first day of home practice. There are many companies that make outstanding kits that fit the description listed above and any music store that carries band instruments will have them. I also recommend listing the instruction book or books that are required throughout the year in your student's recommended instrument list to minimize problems with book availability. Nothing is more frustrating than to lose valuable instruction time because of a lack of materials.

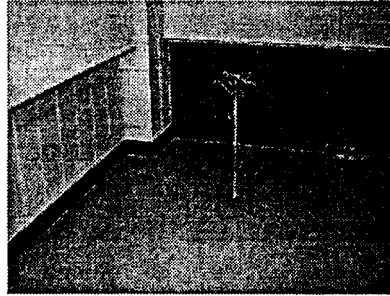
DAY ONE!

The first day of instruction should begin with the correct assembly of the instrument. Many future problems can be avoided by making sure all students understand the proper way to care for their kit. After opening the kit, the student should get the stand out and open the legs. Make sure the students do not open the legs too wide or keep them too close (figure #1).

figure #1



LEGS TOO WIDE



LEGS TOO CLOSE

Having the legs too wide takes up too much space and can result in students tripping over the stand. If the legs are too close, the kit will be off balance and could fall over. The wing nuts on the stands vary from company to company but a good rule of thumb is not to **over-tighten**. This can result in the threads stripping. Once the stand is in place, have the students place the bell set on the stand. Each company has a different system for the mounting of the bell sets but they are all very “user-friendly” and should not be difficult for the students. At first, the students should adjust the height of the bells so that they are approximately waist-high. This will have to be changed later for some students when they have learned the grip and approach to the instrument.

THE MALLETS AND THE GRIP

Again, there is a variety of mallets that are available in the kits. Some will have wooden shafts and others will have plastic. The ball of the mallets will vary from soft rubber to hard acrylic. The grip for mallets is very much like that of the matched snare grip (figure #2).

figure #2



Make sure that they do not grip the mallets too close to the ball or

too close to the end of the shaft. They should always keep the fingers on the mallets. This simple rule will avoid many future problems. The fulcrum of the grip is generally between the thumb and the first knuckle. The feet should be approximately shoulder width and should not be too close or too far from the instrument (figure #3).

figure #3



Now, have the students drop their hand to their sides while gripping the mallets and then bring the mallets up to the instrument. If the forearms are approximately level, the height of the instrument is correct. If the forearms are angled up, lower the instrument. If the forearms are angled down, raise the instrument.

LEARNING THE KEYBOARD

All of the major companies that sell kits engrave or print the note names on the bell sets. For several years, I have had the students cover the note names by placing a small piece of tape directly over the note name on each bar. If the notes are engraved, the notes are still visible if you look closely. However, they are not easily visible and the students are forced to learn where the notes are right from the start. The first year that I made this change, I noticed a dramatic improvement in the quality of the mallet reading in my beginners. Taping the bars does result in a slight dampening of the instrument and I recommend never putting tape on the bars of concert instruments. However, the kits are practice instruments and the loss of tone quality will not be missed. Finding C is always a great place to start with beginners. The easiest way is to have the students find the grouping of two sharp keys, put a finger on the note on their left(C#) of that grouping and then move their finger down to the left. Finding F is done in the same manner but with the grouping of three sharp keys, placing a finger on F# and then moving down to the F. Using a chart of a keyboard can be very helpful, especially in large classes, because the instructor can stay in front of the group and simply point to the notes. Keeping a chart such as this on the

blackboard or on a bulletin board in full view of the class is a very good idea. Once the students can identify C and F on their instrument, they can easily find the other natural keys.

METHOD BOOKS

Choosing a method book for beginner percussionists can be challenging. There are a few options that are available. First, you can choose a separate method book for snare and mallets. There is a multitude of very fine books that are on the market for both. Second, you can choose a method book that covers both snare and mallets. The first two choices are mainly recommended for homogeneous class grouping in which a percussion specialist is instructing the class. However, many beginner band programs are not organized in that manner throughout the state. Many programs have heterogeneous class groupings and no percussion specialist on staff. In situations such as these, using the same book as the rest of the beginner band is highly recommended. I have taught beginner percussion in homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings, used separate method books and used the same method books as the rest of the beginners. For the last three years, I have used a band method book in my beginner percussion classes. For each lesson in this book, there is a snare page and a mallet page. Our beginner percussionists are grouped together, one class on each campus, and I teach both of them. I chose to use this method for three reasons. First, Bob Parsons and Cheryl Floyd, who are the band directors at West Ridge Middle School and Hill Country Middle School respectively, use this band method book in all of their classes. Early in the first semester, they have a beginner concert and play lines from this book. Second, I feel the book is well balanced and with the use of occasional supplemental materials, I can give the students all that they need. Third, I feel that it is very important that the percussionist feel that they are part of the whole band and not a separate entity. There are several outstanding beginner band books that can serve in the same capacity.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD THEY PLAY BELLS?

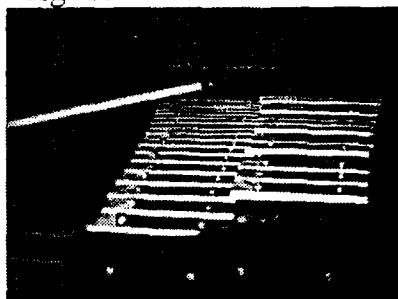
I feel that there should be equal emphasis on bells and snare. I have the students start on one instrument and then switch to the other halfway through the class. One day we start on pad and the other on bells. This gives the students the impression that you as a teacher feel that both facets of percussion are equally important. In a large heterogeneous class, that may be disrupted by the percussionists in the back of the room switching instruments. You can have half of the percussion setup pad and the other half set up

bells at the beginning of the class. When they need to change instruments, they can simply move to another kit that has the opposite set up.

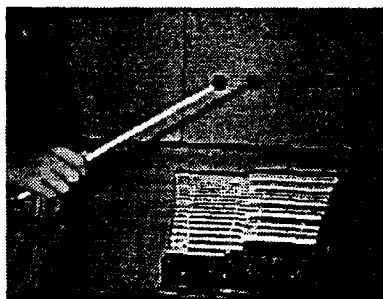
STRIKING THE INSTRUMENT

Throughout the year, the students should always look at their hands before playing and go through a short checklist for their grip and approach (Ex., 1. are my fingers on the mallets 2. are my feet a shoulder width apart 3. are my hands flat). The instructor must be diligent in this throughout the year to insure that students do not develop bad habits. I often use the phrase "let's see the perfect grips" before we begin playing an exercise. This can help the students get into the habit of grip maintenance. Once the instructor is confident that the grips are set, the students are ready to begin playing. The stroke should begin with mallet balls 1-3 inches from the bars (figure #4).

figure #4



MALLETS AT REST



PREPARATION/FOLLOW
THROUGH

There are three parts to the stroke. The preparation, stroke and follow-through. The preparation for the stroke is to lift the mallet ball straight up by using the wrist (a slight movement in the forearm will result). The stroke is a direct downward motion and the follow-through is a lift directly upward to approximately the same height as the preparation. The mallet should return naturally to the pre-playing position. Some refer to this stroke as the "piston" or "legato" stroke. The students should always avoid "downstroking" into the bars. The motion should be relaxed and not stiff. A slight arm motion is recommended as long as the wrist is not locking. A percussionist uses the whole arm while playing. Avoid using the phrase, "play with your wrists". This creates a feeling of rigidity in the students and will result in rigid playing. **In the beginning of the year, have the students slowly (quarter notes at m.m. 60) play 4 repeated strokes in one hand on one note. Then**

switch to the other hand and repeat the same exercise. Gradually over time, speed up the exercise and change to 8 strokes on each hand. This is a great way to work on grip and stroke at the beginning of each class.

ROLLS

One of the most important techniques in mallet playing is the roll. All rolls on mallets are to be, done using single strokes. Learning to play the single stroke roll can begin as soon as the students have learned to play alternating strokes. This is also a technique that is vital to snare playing so it can be reinforced when they are playing snare drum. I use the following warmup to teach the single stroke roll. This can be done in heterogeneous classes while the rest of the class is playing long tone scale exercises. In the beginning of the year, have the students play alternating strokes in quarter notes at m.m. 60 and gradually over time increase the tempo. At m.m.120, change to 8th notes at m.m.60 and increase the tempo over time. **At** m.m.120, change to 16th notes at m.m. 60 and increase the tempo over time. This process may take one semester or even two semesters. Be patient! Always make sure that the strokes are even as they are playing. Students will often emphasize their strongest hand which will create a very uneven sound. Roll speed on concert instruments is dependant upon the size of the bar. On a concert grand marimba, the roll speed required to get the proper sound from a low A is quite slow while the speed for the highest note is --- extremely fast. If the roll speed is too fast for the bar, it will not be able to respond fast enough and will not have a resonant sound. If the roll speed is too slow for the bar, you will hear a specific rhythm rather than a simple sustained tone from the bar. While the importance of roll speed is not as great to the beginner mallet student who plays on a small bell set, it is very important that they are made aware of this concept early in their development.

STICKINGS

Throughout the year, the students will need constant reminders regarding stickings. **A good rule of thumb at first is to alternate everything.** As the music gets progressively more difficult, the students will begin having to use double stickings to avoid awkward crossing of the hands. **Other than warmup exercises, beginners should never use more than two consecutive strokes in the same hand.**

“WHAT ARE ALL THOSE REALLY BIG BELL SETS?”

At some point in the beginner year, the students will need to learn about the concert instruments that they are going to play on

the next year. Some schools have their beginner percussionists play on the concert instruments during their beginner year concerts. They need to know a little about those instruments before they play them. If you have some or all of the basic concert mallet instruments in your middle school band hall you have an advantage in this area. But most middle schools have only two, one or none of those instruments. In that case, handouts describing the instruments, percussion company promos and posters will do very well. I feel that the students should learn the names of the major metal and wood mallet instruments and the physical differences (smallest, pedal/no pedal, etc...) between them. The type of mallets that are used on each concert instrument is also very important for them to know before they begin playing. Bells require hard rubber, hard plastic or acrylic. Avoid brass mallets at the middle school level. If used improperly, they can severely damage the instrument. Hard rubber, plastic or acrylic can be used on xylophone. If the xylophone has rosewood bars, avoid using acrylic mallets. Medium to soft rubber, yarn or cord can be used on marimba and the same for vibes but never use acrylic or hard plastic!! The type of wood or synthetic material is also important because students should know that rosewood needs extra care. How to move the instruments from one location to another is vital to preserving the quality of the equipment. **Always cover the mallets instruments before they are moved. Lift the wheels over any bumps or cracks in the floor. If one student is moving a mallet instrument, they should pull it from the small end so they can lift the frame over bumps and cracks. Pushing an instrument, particularly from the big end, is the way many frames are ruined.**

GOALS FOR THE YEAR

It is good to have some basic goals to achieve throughout the year. Below is a list of tasks or techniques and a possible timeline. The timeline is approximate as each class and year is different.

1st SEMESTER

- *instrument maintenance

- *grip

- *note recognition on instrument

- *basic theory (cleff, staff, whole, half, dotted half, dotted quarter and quarter notes with related rests, 4/4, 2/4 & 3/4 time signatures)

- *stroke and warmups

- * range from low B flat to middle B flat

2nd SEMESTER

- *knowledge of concert mallet instruments
 - *intermediate level theory (major scales through five flats, key signatures, articulations, dynamics, 3/8, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8, alla breve)
 - *single stroke roll fully developed
 - *range from G beneath the staff to C above the staff
 - *beginning solo literature
 - *guidelines for logical stickings

CONSISTENCY

The most important teaching tool that an instructor can use with beginning percussionists is consistency. They need to play both instruments every day and they need to have constant reminders regarding their technique. Hopefully, this handout has provided some food for thought regarding the beginner mallet percussionist.