

“Developing Outstanding High School Percussionists”

The Percussion Educational Philosophies of the Franklin Central High School Band and Franklin Central Percussion Symphony.

Presentation Overview:

- I. *“Musician, Percussionist, Drummer”*
- II. *“The Total Percussionist”*
- III. *“The Number One Tool”*
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- XII. *“The Small Ensemble”*
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- XIV. *“IPA, WGI And Indoor Percussion”*
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Presented by Daniel Fyffe

Sponsored by Premier Percussion Limited, Vic Firth, Inc., and Jent’s House of Music

Included in Clinic Book

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- Percussion Articles
- Free Cadence
- Franklin Central Percussion Symphony Resources including sample calendar, budget, itinerary, and Percussion Parents Financial Support Group, Inc. Summary
- Franklin Central Percussion Symphony Sampler CD Index Page
- Franklin Central Percussion Symphony Sampler CD

TBA Convention/Clinic 2003

56th Annual Texas Band Masters Association Clinic/Convention
Developing Outstanding High School Percussionists, presented by Daniel Fyffe

Resource Page:

Mallet Books –

- Instruction Course for Xylophone – George Hamilton Green
Edited by Randy Eyles and Garwood Whaley
Meredith Music Publications
- Method of Movement – Leigh Howard Stevens
Published by Keyboard Percussion Publications
- Simply Four – Gifford Howarth
Published by Tap Space Publications

Organizations

- Percussive Arts Society – <http://www.pas.org>
- Winter Guard International – <http://wgi.org>
- Indiana Percussion Association – <http://www.indianapercussion.org>
- Texas Bandmasters Association - <http://www.txband.com>

Sponsors and Contributors to Clinic

- Premier Percussion Limited - <http://www.premier-percussion.com/>
- Vic Firth, Inc. - <http://www.vicfirth.com/>
- Jent's House of Music - <http://www.jents.com/>
- Meredith Music Publications - <http://www.meredithmusic.com/>

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Presentation Overview Summaries:

I. "Musician, Percussionist, Drummer"

This is my order of priorities for all percussionists, including those who only want to bang on the drum set in pep band. By becoming a percussionist, the drummer will find his/her skills improved with new techniques and approaches open to them. By striving to be a musician, the percussionist's performance will be enhanced by his/her careful attention to musical detail. For the student who started only to play the drum, his/her drumming has improved by employing new techniques learned through the study of percussion and a new attitude toward musically. My best drummers are my best mallet players. The visa versa is also true; my best mallet players are my best drummers. My best musicians in the percussion section can play all the percussion instruments and are excellent drummers.

II. "The Total Percussionist"

The percussionist has to play every instrument in the back of the band room. By expanding technique knowledge base through learning different instruments, the percussionist improves control and touch. It is very difficult to teach music theory and music fundamentals to a student who only plays the bass drum.

III. "The Number One Tool"

Not the hands, not the eyes, but the ears. So many great percussionists in the world, with so many different techniques, share one common asset, a great set of ears. The ability to critically evaluate what one hears and one's own sound is crucial. It is too easy for drummers to pound away mindlessly without constantly evaluating and adjusting sound quality. As with the wind musician, the director must put the percussionist's performance under the "microscope" and help the student critically evaluate the sound quality.

IV. "Small Steps"

Upon arriving at Franklin Central High School, members of the drum line told me their job was to stand around, try to act cool, and do as little work as possible. That attitude changed quickly. The Franklin Central Percussion Symphony did not become the ensemble presented in the enclosed CD overnight. Several small steps had to be taken one at a time to go from a group that had trouble standing at attention to the group that is presented on the CD in the back of this book.

Small steps include:

1. Teaching students to take pride in appearance of group and equipment.
2. Teaching students to work together.
3. Developing a communication system.
4. Teaching students to carefully maintain, store and pack equipment for travel.
5. Teaching students to be champions, on and off the floor.
6. Creating a slogan or motto that fits group.
7. Creating a group logo.
8. Beginning a spring training program to prepare students for the upcoming marching percussion season.
9. Taking students to a drum and bugle corps contest, winter percussion contest or a professional percussion solo or ensemble performance.
10. Encouraging students to attend a summer music camp.
11. Encouraging more students to study privately or institute a private study program at your school.
12. Teaching students it is just as cool/fun to play congas/percussion in jazz band, as it is to play drum set.
13. Expecting and demanding students to have a level and maintain of proficiency on all percussion instruments.
14. Teaching students to perform on percussion keyboards using two and four mallets.
15. Teaching students to understand basic theory and to harmonize with given chords.
16. Preparing and presenting a small percussion ensemble on a concert or at contest.
17. Presenting an entire percussion concert for a local elementary school or retirement community.
18. Presenting a percussion concert with a guest artist or college ensemble, inviting other school percussion ensembles to attend and perform on concert.
19. Recording a CD of the ensemble.
20. Performing at a percussion festival or a music teacher convention.
21. Competing in a winter percussion competition.
22. Encouraging students to participate in the Percussive Arts Society including attendance the Percussive Arts Society International Convention.

V. "Warm-Up!"

My first big revelation while participating in the Drum and Bugle Corps activity was the amount of time devoted toward warming-up. Simple is better when it comes to warm-ups. Percussionists will have no trouble with the concept of warming-up during marching season, but they do have trouble with this concept during the concert season. Though they may not need to warm-up for their concert band part assignments, they need to continue doing appropriate warm-ups that will enable them to develop and gain more proficiency.

VI. "Life is Short, Play Loud"

I am not advocating that percussionists pound out parts, but play with a correct wrist stroke, which will enable them to gain strength and control. If after three years of bands, the students' hands have not gained much strength, then there is a problem in the playing and/or teaching approach. I believe percussion students need to first learn to play with a correct wrist stroke to get a strong, full sound, and then gradually gain the control needed to perform a full range of dynamics. How soon this will occur depends on the individual student's talents and practice habits. By the way, "Life is Short, Play Loud", was one of the early mottos of the Franklin Central High School Drum Line. It was eventually replaced. "Setting the Standard" is the current motto of the Franklin Central Percussion Symphony.

VII. "Anything That Can Fall Will Fall"

This is a saying I used as students loaded equipment truck. Many other sayings have come and gone over the years such as: "If it sounds bad, it is bad". As trivial as it may seem, teaching students how to properly load the equipment not only saved on repairs, but also the members of the Franklin Central Percussion Symphony developed a sense of pride at how efficiently they loaded the trucks. This helped students feel more like champions on and off the floor. It also helped get out of the winter weather quicker. At many contest the students have their trucks loaded while the group ahead of them is still figure out where to start.

VIII. "Snares, Traps & Other Hunting Devices"

You're only as good as your instrument or the right trap for the right job. An investment in good quality traps will help enhance your percussionist's musical growth. Make it as cool to be the percussionist in jazz band as it is to be the drum set player. A good quality tambourine incorporated with good technique instruction will open a new world for the percussionist.

IX. "Keep It Positive"

This is the only way to be. This does not mean stop disciplining and demanding high standards from your percussionist. Staying positive, maintaining a high energy level and being enthusiastic will help to energize your percussionist. A great time to exercise the power of positive thinking is after a disappointing performance. Find one thing that went well and emphasize it! If you are writing announcements for your school, word them in such a way that your students will be presented in a positive light. Emphasize judges' compliments, positive experiences and fun moments from the performance or contest.

X. "Plan & Be Organized"

From planning itineraries, organizing equipment, assigning parts, some days playing percussion is more about the art of organizing than about the actual playing of the instrument. Planning and organizing means making sure students have the proper mallets, all parts are covered and that students have all needed instruments.

Organization, unfortunately, does not always come naturally for students. However, the life lesson learned from being an organized percussionist will be a great asset for your students.

XI. "Teach Music, The Trophy Case Will Take Care Of Itself"

When you place emphasis on good music fundamentals and a sound teaching philosophy, the level of your student's performance will continue to grow. It is a great long-term philosophy to adopt as a teacher. If you focus on good sound fundamental instruction

and teach students to be good musicians, you will have all the trophies your cases can handle.

XII. "The Small Ensemble"

The small ensemble, that is, the percussion ensemble, is a great vehicle for student percussionists to realize musical elements of melody, harmony and rhythm. The small percussion ensemble is a great vehicle for percussionist's musical growth. The student can perform on an instrument they normally do not get to perform on in band. For once, they can carry the melody, try their hand at improvisation or play an inner harmony part. There are percussion ensembles written in all styles that students will enjoy performing and audiences will enjoy listening to. Pick out a variety of ensembles including a hip-hop, funk, and rock and roll; and take your students to a local elementary school to perform. Your students will have a blast, the elementary students will be dancing in the aisle, and you have now recruited future musicians for your band program.

XIII. "Simple Way To Improve Performance Level"

You can improve your percussion ensemble's performance by using two simple words, "eye-contact". This works extremely well since percussion performance is naturally very visual. Eye contact will not only tighten the performance, it will make it a much more enjoyable experience for the performer and audience. The student percussionist will realize he/she is not the only one in the ensemble and begin to learn to react to the percussionists around them. The students will appear much more confident during their performance and learn how to non-verbally cue each other, thus creating a smoother performance.

XIV. "IPA, WGI And Indoor Percussion"

To compete or not to compete, that is the question. The question has to be constantly asked and re-evaluated. Has the Franklin Central Percussion Symphony improved because of competition? The answer is yes. Didn't the Franklin Central Percussion Symphony improve through non-competitive venues? The answer is also yes.

So the question remains, to compete or not to compete. The Franklin Central Percussion Symphony went beyond what I believed was possible for a percussion group to achieve as a performing ensemble once it began competing. For now, the Franklin Central Percussion Symphony continues to compete. However, the question will always be asked and re-evaluated.

XV. "Hands of Fire"

In the 1920's, George Hamilton Green created a series of lessons that can be applied today to enable students to play with great technique. The technique enables students to move rapidly around the keyboard. The technique helps students minimize any movement that would be wasteful or slow them down. An excerpt from the Green Instructional course has been included in this clinic book. Have students carefully read and apply the rules for practice. All instructions included with each exercise should be meticulously followed. These exercises also make great warm-ups.

I have combined the Green technique with what I have learned from my own instructors, plus what I have learned from my experiences while teaching percussion ensembles and percussion students.

Technique highlights:

- A. Keep hands low to keyboard.
- B. Use wrist for lateral movement, arms for horizontal movement.
- C. Mallets move in a straight line up and down the keyboard.
- D. When mallets move up the keyboard, the right hand leads. When mallets move down the keyboard, the left hand leads.
- E. While moving up the keyboard, the left hand never gets ahead of the right hand.
- F. While moving down a keyboard, the right hand never gets ahead of the left hand.
- G. Do not cross mallets while moving up and down keyboard.
- H. The percussionist needs to be centered on his/her instrument. Before the percussionist plays, he/she should place his/her right mallet on the highest note that will be played and his/her left mallet on the lowest note that will be played. He/She should then center up in the middle of the playing range.
- I. Playing area is extremely important, be consistent.
- J. Hands stay behind keyboard.
- K. Employ dynamics during warm-ups. Crescendo while going up the keyboard, decrescendo while going down the keyboard.
- L. Perform all exercises in the George Hamilton Green Instructional Course as directed.