

CHANGING YOUR CONCUSSION SECTION INTO A PERCUSSION SECTION

By Jared Spears

While rehearsing and preparing various honor bands I've found it is necessary to spend quite a bit of time changing a "conclusion" section into a percussion section. Also, while adjudicating bands at regional and national contests, I see and hear similar problems creating unmusical and uncharacteristic sounding percussion sections. Not only does the musical effect suffer, so does the intent of the music itself. As a composer, conductor and percussionist, I would like to offer a few suggestions for improving the overall sound, performance, and interpretation of the percussion parts, thus improving the total musicality and effect of the band.

Placement of the instrument in the band, on the stand, and at the appropriate height is extremely important for proper characteristic, clear and balanced sound. Placing a suspended cymbal horizontally on the cymbal stand (not at an angle such as a ride cymbal) affords maximum ring and production of the highs and lows of its "overtones". Unless both hands are needed for proper performance, all small percussion instruments (triangle, tambourine, wood block, maracas) should be played at the performer's eye level insuring that the sound will pass over the heads of the wind players. Mallet instruments may be placed behind the winds, but as close to the audience as possible (especially the chimes and vibes). Timpani and bass drum should be next to each other as they carry the bass line of the percussion choir and can coordinate their parts successfully.

Tuning and proper maintenance of the instrument for characteristic sound and proper pitch (actual or implied) effects the overall pitch of the band. If the mallet instruments have dented, broken or chipped bars and tubes, these irregularities can obviously create nasty pitch problems. If the timpani is not tuned correctly, the band's overall pitch will sound "muddy". For example, one function of the timpani is that of a member of the bass pitch spectrum. If the low winds are playing a Bb and the timpani is mistakenly playing a B, the entire band suffers. Timpanists must have the ability to hear a given pitch and match it by humming. They should also possess a pitch pipe to use in selecting those pitches required for the various pieces being played. Snare drums, bass drums and tom-toms are implied pitched instruments, that is, those which give the sense of high to low but not actual pitch, ie: A 440, etc. Snare drums must be the highest implied pitch of the drum family (not sounding like a typical dead, low, rock drum). They should have a high, crisp sound, with some ring. Bass drums are the lowest implied pitch of the drum family, as low as possible while still being able to produce a fat, ringing sound. Tom-toms should be pitched in graduated intervals of thirds or fourths expanding from the bass drum to the snare drum. To make sure each of these drums are in tune with themselves, tighten the tuning lugs so that the head produces an actual pitch at every point around the outer inch of the head. For drums with top (beating) and bottom (vibrating) heads, make sure the top head is tighter than the bottom. In the final tuning process for tom-toms and bass drums, destroy the actual pitch created earlier by turning every other tuning lug 1/4 turn to the left. With this action, you now have implied pitched drums, sounds that will not conflict with the actual pitches of the lower to middle range wind instruments. Tambourine heads must be tuned to a high pitch for optimum sound. Don't use a headless tambourine unless the music calls for it or you are playing a rock or similar style piece. Make sure the triangle does not have an actual pitch. If it does have an actual pitch your upper woodwinds will sound out of tune.

For good sound production, the player must find the most effective and characteristic sounding, playing area on the instrument. Then, while playing, the percussionist must draw the sound out of the instrument, not pound it in! If the proper sticks, beaters, or mallets are not indicated on the part, they must be selected in accordance with the needs required for producing the requested style and effect of the music. Crash cymbal players must produce a "tzing" sound on general articulations with volumes up to **mf**, and a wet, ringing, "splash" sound when playing **mf** and louder. The cymbalist needs to experiment and find the exact methods necessary for producing these sounds.

Last, but certainly not least is the interpretation of percussion parts. Writing meaningful,

structurally and motivically significant percussion parts for band music has been a goal ever since I began composing. Consequently, whenever I hear a dull, un-musical and incorrect stylistic performance by the percussion players, I am rightfully disappointed. How does one fix this problem? Simple! Treat and instruct the percussionist with the same enthusiasm, care and expertise as the wind player, not as the "salt and pepper" or "addition" to the whole. Teach the percussionists to be as sensitive to style and phrasing as one does the winds. As an example: when playing keyboard percussion, two or more tom-toms, or temple blocks, the performer should crescendo as the written line rises, and decrescendo as the line falls, keeping within the general area of volume requested on the part.

Above all, music selection for rehearsal and concert needs to include the percussion as an equally contributing section of the overall band experience (notice the pride and enthusiasm of the percussion in the marching band where they are considered as the "core" of the ensemble).

Using the above suggestions: as well as the director's own imaginative teaching techniques, one can change a percussion section to an enjoyable, beneficial, and productive percussion section.

The Percussion Music of Jared Spears on the UIL List

1. Solos
 - a. Class 3
 1. *Two Episodes* : 2 timpani (F, Bb)--C.L. Barnhouse
 - b. Class 2
 1. *Malletrix* : marimba--Southern Music Co.
2. Multiple percussion solos
 - a. Class 3
 1. *A Graphic Portrait* : sus. cym., snare drum, 3 t-toms--C.L. Barnhouse
 2. *Trilogy* : snare drum, any mallet instrument, 5 temple blocks or 5 drums with graduated pitch--C.L. Barnhouse
 - b. Class 2
 1. *Introduction and Furioso* : 4 t-toms, 2 sus. cyms. (large, small)--C.L. Barnhouse
 - c. Class 1
 1. *Energy Suite* : sus. cym., 3 t-toms, snare drum, mallet instrument--C.L. Barnhouse
 2. *Prologue and Jubilo* : 2 timpani (C,G), bells, sus. cym., 4 t-toms--Southern Music Co.
3. Ensembles
 - a. Class 3
 - *1. *Collisions* : 4 performers--C.L. Barnhouse
 2. *Holiday Suite for Percussion* : 3 performers--C.L. Barnhouse
 3. *Prologue and Fight* : 4 performers--Southern Music Co.
 4. *Jubiloso* : 5 performers--Southern Music Co.
 - b. Class 2
 - *1. *Bayport Sketch* : 8 or 9 performers--C.L. Barnhouse
 - * 2. *Cameo Suite* : 6 performers--C.L. Barnhouse
 - *3. *Country Variations* : 6 performers--C.L. Barnhouse
 4. *Flight of the Falcon* : 8 performers--Southern Music Co.
 - *5. *Mosaics* : 6 performers--C.L. Barnhouse
 - *6. *Scamper* : 5 performers--C.L. Barnhouse
 - c. Class 1
 1. *Blues and Chaser* : 8 performers--Southern Music Co.
 2. *Caprice Diabolique* : 8 performers--Southern Music Co.
 3. *Clintonian Sketch* : 8 performers--Southern Music Co.

*Recording available on the CD *Mosaics: The Percussion Music of Jared Spears*

The Washington Winds Percussion Ensemble on Walking Frog Records, distributed by C.L. Barnhouse Co.

TRANSFORMING THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CONCUSSIONIST INTO A PERCUSSIONIST

A CLINIC BY JARED SPEARS

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A. Concept of a Good Percussion Section

1. Overall quality of sound
 - a. Instruments of good quality and kept in excellent condition
 - b. Correct tuning of instruments
 - c. Playing each instrument in a way that will bring out its best and most characteristic sound
2. Technical Proficiency
 - a. Students able to perform on all percussion instruments
 - b. Correct concepts of mallet selection
 - c. Correct concepts of position and articulation
3. Musicianship
 - a. Proper phrasing concepts
 - b. A good ear
 - c. Musical imagination
4. Esprit de corps

B. Putting it All Together with the Music: Solo and Ensemble Music in the Private Lesson and/or Percussion Class for Concentrated Study (as a supplement to the regular exercises from method books, etc.)

1. Understanding percussion notation
2. Percussion "melody"
 - a. Actual
 - b. Implied
3. Percussion "harmony"
 - a. Actual
 - b. Implied
4. Compositional devices as used in percussion writing
 - a. Counterpoint
 - b. Countermelody
 - c. Figuration
 - d. Ostinato
5. Form

All forms used in music may be found in percussion literature. When analyzing the form of a particular work, be sure to use the above information as applied to percussion writing for proper identification of the elements of the score.

C. Examples

1. *Prologue and Jubilo*

TIMPANI (C-G)

BELLS

I

Slow

The musical notation consists of two staves. The top staff is for Timpani (C-G) and the bottom staff is for Bells. The music is in 4/4 time and marked 'Slow'. The top staff begins with a forte (f) dynamic and a circled '2a'. It features a series of notes with dynamics ranging from sfz to f. The bottom staff begins with a forte (f) dynamic and a circled '1'. It features a series of notes with dynamics ranging from sfz to f.

2a (of course)

BELLS (r. h.)

p

TIMPANI (l. h.)

3a *p*

II

(Use grey yarn mallets)

Fast

1 L. v. 2a

sus. Cymb.

sus. Cym.

4 tuned Tom-Toms

Timp. C G

p *f* Tom-Toms *p* *f* Tom-Toms

Turn right mallet over
Play on butt end

1 r.h.

ff *dim.* lh.

1

Turn right mallet back

cresc. *ff*

1 Timp. C G

p *f* 3a

G.C.

Timp. C G

ff

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2. Energy Suite (I. Sunrays)

Allegro (♩-120)
(S.D. 5T1C4G5)

13 2a

molto legato

mf *f* *mp* *mf* *(mp)* *f (subito)* *p* *mf*

S.Cym.
Dome of Cym.
edge of Cym.
S.D.
3 Tom Toms

on rims

The score consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a dynamic of *mf* and a tempo marking of *Allegro* (♩-120). It includes performance instructions for cymbals and tom-toms. The second staff continues the melody with dynamics *mp* and *f*. The third staff features dynamics *mp*, *mf*, *(mp)*, *f (subito)*, *p*, and *mf*, ending with a series of 'x' marks indicating a specific rhythmic pattern.

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3. Two Episodes (II) Timpani (in B♭ & E♭)

Allegro (♩-120)

2a

rit. e dim. poco a poco

Play on bows of Timpani with heads *a tempo* of mallets

p *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *(subito)*

Turn R.H. mallet over play on butt end on head of Temp. 2a

R.H.
L.H.

L.H. play on head of mallet on head of Timpani

Turn R.H. mallet over play with head of mallet

Both mallets

p *mf* *p* *f* *ffp* *f*

The score is written for timpani in two parts: Right Hand (R.H.) and Left Hand (L.H.). It begins with a tempo of *Allegro* (♩-120) and a dynamic of *p*. The first section includes a *rit. e dim. poco a poco* instruction. The second section features dynamics *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *p*, with a *(subito)* change to *p*. The third section involves mallet technique changes, including playing on the butt end of the mallet and then the head. Dynamics range from *mf* to *f*. The final section uses both mallets with dynamics *p*, *mf*, *p*, *f*, *ffp*, and *f*.

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4. Holiday Suite for Percussion

I. Holiday For Three

Allegro (♩ = 120)

S.Cym./Timp. sticks (play on balls of sticks)

Percussion I
Triangle
Suspended Cymbal

Percussion II
3 Tom Toms
(or 3 Snare Drums)
Snares - off
Tune to High-med.-low pitch

Percussion III
Tambourine
Bass Drum

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-8) features Percussion I (Triangle/Suspended Cymbal) with a melody starting on a half note G4, followed by quarter notes. Percussion II (Tom Toms/Snares) plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Percussion III (Tambourine/Bass Drum) plays a simple bass line. Dynamics include *f* and *2a*. The second system (measures 9-16) includes a first ending instruction: "1st time: Turn sticks around play on butt ends of sticks; 2nd time: to Trp." Percussion I has a circled *1* and "let ring". Percussion II has a circled *4b*. Percussion III has a circled *2b* and "to Tambourine". Dynamics include *f* and *p*. The third system (measures 17-22) includes a second ending instruction: "2. 2b Trp." Percussion I has a circled *2b* and "1. on dome (bell) of Cym.". Percussion II has a circled *4c* and "to B.D.". Percussion III has a circled *4c*. Dynamics include *p*. The final system (measures 23-28) is a canon for Percussion I, marked "CANON (4A)". Percussion I has a circled *2a* and *f*. Percussion II has a circled *2b* and *p*. Percussion III has a circled *2b* and *f*. Dynamics include *f* and *p*.

5. Prologue and Fight **4a** (FUGUE)

$\text{♩} = 132$

12 Sn. Dr. **2a**

(S. D.)

2 Tom toms

mp

20

mp

2a

mp

(S. D.)

(T. T.)

Sus. Cym./Se. Dr. sticks

mf

mp

2a

p

34

mp

mf

mf

Play on bell of Cym.

mf

38

sfzp

mf

f

f

Timp.

mp

f

2a + 3a

14

f

sfz

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6. Mosaics

(♩ = 128)

15

p

mp

4b

2a

2a

mp

p

mp

p

23

mp

p

4c

1

f

f

f

f

STRETTO

p *mp* *mf* *cresc. poco a poco*

4a

cresc. poco a poco *mf*

cresc. poco a poco *mf*

cresc. poco a poco

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7. Blues and Chaser

*Medium blues tempo

2a Mar. Solo *mf*

3a Vibes

3b Bells s2 *mf* 2nd time only

Bells 1.v.

Xylo.roll

Tamb. (thumb roll) 2x only *mf* *p*

4c Medium yarn pellets *mp* *p*

H.H. *mf*

B.D. *mf*

1 S.D.K.S. 2nd X *p*

*Note: All eighth notes are to be played as triplets. (Jazz style)

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