### 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 "concussion" 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 concussion 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.
- Multiple percussion solos
  - a. Class 3
    - 1. A Graphic Portrait: sus. cym., snare drum, 3 t-toms--C.L. Barnhouse
    - Trilogy: snare drum, any mallet instrument, 5 temple blocks or 5 drums with graduated pitch--C.L. Barnhouse
  - b. Class 2
    - Introduction and Furioso: 4 t-toms, 2 sus. cyms. (large, small)--C.L. Barnhouse
  - c. Class 1
    - Energy Suite: sus. cym., 3 t-toms, snare drum, mallet instrument— C.L. Barnhouse
    - 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
    - Prologue and Fight: 4 performers--Southern Music Co.
    - 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
    - Blues and Chaser: 8 performers--Southern Music Co.
    - Caprice Diabolique: 8 performers--Southern Music Co.
    - 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.

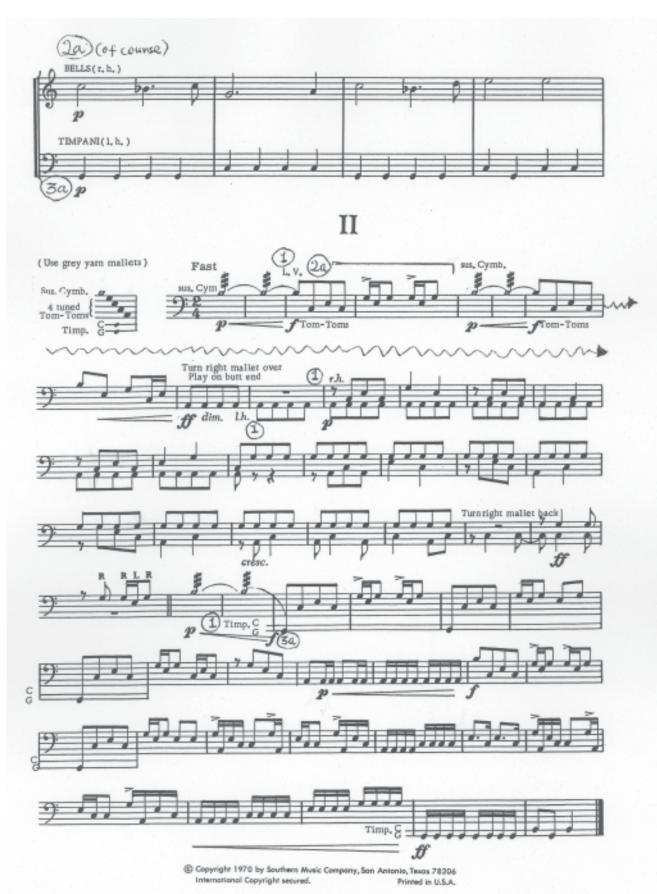
## TRANSFORMING THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CONCUSSIONIST INTO A PERCUSSIONIST

# A CLINIC BY JARED SPEARS JIKSPEARS @ Earthlink, net

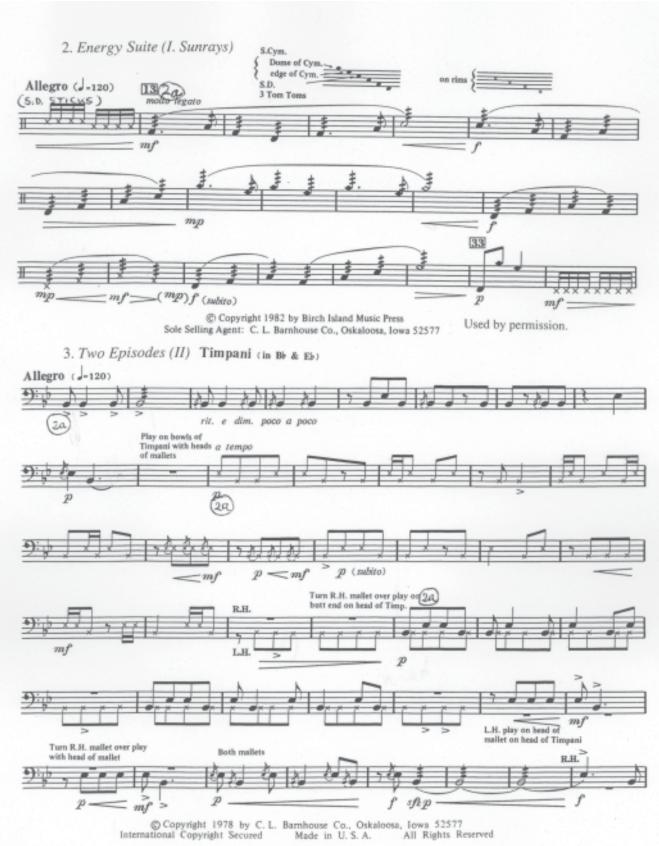
- A. Concept of a Good Percussion Section
  - 1. Overall quality of sound
    - a. Instruments of good quality and kept in excellent condition
    - b. Correct tuning of instruments
    - Playing each instrument in a way that will bring out its best and most characteristic sound
  - 2. Technical Proficiency
    - 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
  - Compositional devices as used in percussion writing
    - a. Counterpoint
    - b. Countermelody
    - c. Figuration
    - d. Ostinato
  - 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.



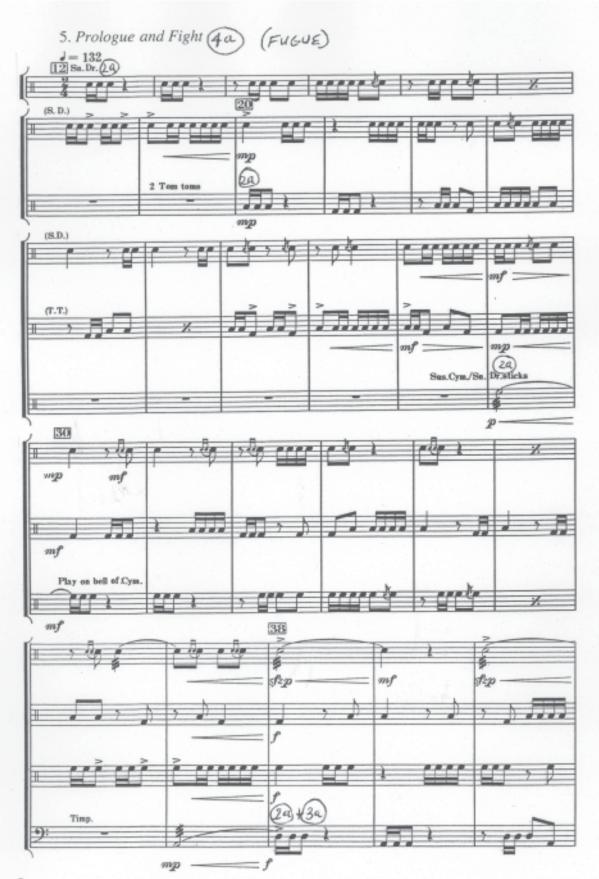


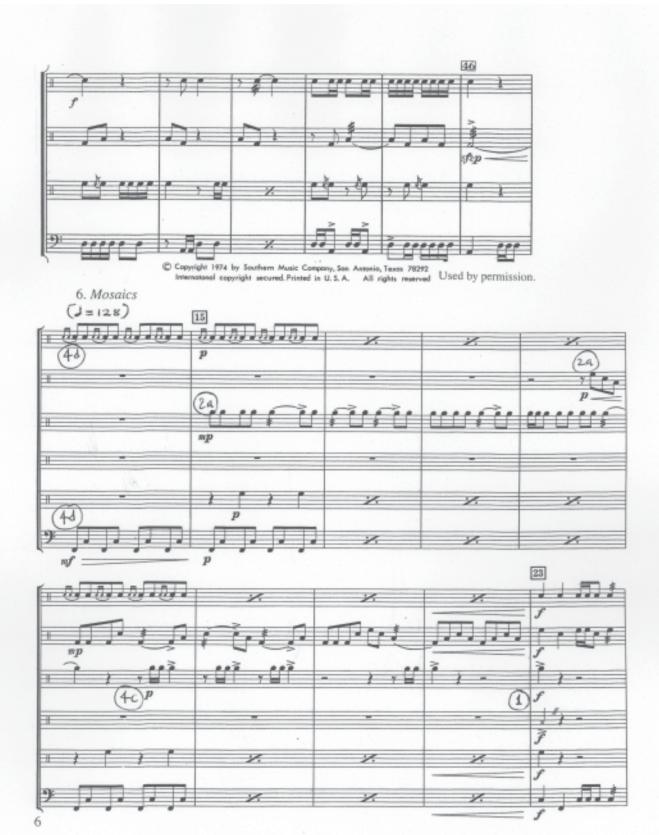
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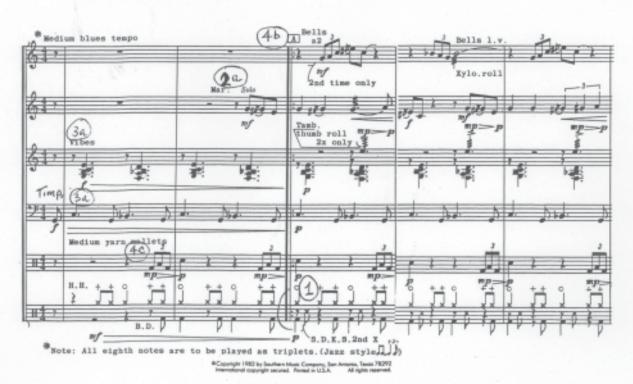




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#### 7. Blues and Chaser



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