2020 NHBDA Honors Band

Auxiliary Percussion Technique Tips & Tricks

One of the most difficult parts of being a percussionist is that you must be ready to produce good technique on a large variety of instruments. Rather than being a single instrument specialist as most other musicians are, percussionists have a huge library that they must cater to. What follows is a brief guide for technique on each instrument that your percussionist will be covering in the auxiliary audition for NHBDA.

Resonating Percussion Techniques

With any percussion instrument that has sustained tone after it is struck, muffling the sound is quite important. Rests need to be observed as the point in time where resonance is stopped, especially for instruments that ring out longer like cymbals. If there is a tie on the note leading to the rest following it, the instrument is to be left to resonate. The following are instruments that are generally muffled in this fashion.

Bass Drum

Bass drum is to be played standing upright. The striking area is off center so that the drum itself has some resonance, about halfway between the center and the edge. In order to achieve the best tone the drum should be slightly muffled while playing. Typically, the player will strike on the right side of the drum while holding the left side with an open hand. At the same time, the right knee is propped onto the side of the drum that is struck by placing the foot on the bass drum stand or a chair that is placed next to the drum. When performing rolls on the bass drum, both mallets will be on the right side of the drum in a good striking area while the knee gently dampens some of the resonance.

Suspended Cymbal

Suspended cymbal is generally played with yarn mallets, preferably medium soft but any yarn mallet should work fine. While playing, have the mallets near the edge of the cymbal on opposite sides (9 o'clock and 3 o'clock). To muffle the cymbal, use one or both hands. Once again, watch out for ties to see if the note should be sustained.

Triangle

Triangle can be played by using a hardware clamp held in one hand and suspending the triangle off of a cord attached to it, or using two clamps and attaching them to a music stand. For the best tone, make sure to use the side opposite of the opening, striking about an inch away from the corner (use the bottom corner if using only one beater). For rolls with one beater, use the inside corner near where you struck and move the beater between the two sides quickly. Rolls with two beaters when the triangle is mounted on a music stand are just simple single-stroke rolls.

Non-resonating Percussion Techniques

Tambourine

This instrument has many different has many different techniques, but there are only a few simple ones required for the audition piece. The tambourine you use for the audition should have a head on it in order to play the excerpt properly. To play louder sections, make a fist with one hand. Use the middle joints of the finger to strike flatly on the head. To play softer sections, put all of your fingertips together so they resemble a pentagon and tap on the head closer to the edge. All the rolls in the audition piece are shake rolls. To perform a shake roll, hold the rim in one hand. Rotate the forearm back and forth to create a sustained sound. Each roll should have an attack and release, so make sure to strike the head for each, especially paying attention to whether or not the roll is tied to a note at its endpoint.

Setup

In addition to knowledge of good technique on a wide variety of instruments, it is very important to set up your instruments in a way that will facilitate efficient and quiet switches during rests. For this auxiliary etude, percussionists should have a trap table with a towel or other soft surface on the top next to both the suspended cymbal and bass drum. The triangle and tambourine should be left on the trap table (or triangle mounted to the music stand) in addition to any mallets that you use for the bass drum and suspended cymbal. The music stand should be right in front of the table. Please use the diagram below as a basis for your setup.

There is a lot to percussion technique with all the different instruments that players are required to cover. Should you have any further questions, a great resource is *The Complete Percussionist* by Robert B. Breithaupt. Or, if you would like to get in touch with me, I would be happy to answer your technique questions as well. Thank you and best of luck helping your students with the audition process.

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