

# COLTS

PERCUSSION  
BOOK CYMBALS

CYMBALS



Thank you for auditioning with The Colts Drum & Bugle Corps. We look forward to seeing you showcase your talents and strengths through the technique packet and beyond. We stress the need to read and understand all technical descriptions as well as have all music memorized as a part of your preparation. We will strive to have a very strong, and educational audition process. The people who are the most prepared as well as those who improve the most will be asked back until the ensemble is finalized.

In general, you will need to be:

Mature

Musically Competent

Technically Proficient

Teachable/Humble

Physically fit

Able to afford the time, and financial commitments

### Make Music, Not Noise:

In our activity, it is simple to forget that what we're trying to do is play music, competitively, at the highest level. It is also simple to get too wrapped up in technique or the latest rudiment combo etc. Although we will be looking for people with chops and a high level of understanding, we need competent musicians. Rhythmic accuracy and control are the building blocks to achieving our goals, but a mature, musical ear is at least as important. The more dialed in your ears are, the more you can blend, balance and play clean. Listening to a diverse palette of music will help this process. Step out of your comfort zone and listen to some new music. Find some music you can chop out to that is not what you normally listen to.

### Chops:

This is a Drum & Bugle Corps. You must have chops (technical strength/proficiency) to withstand the rigors of our daily rehearsals. Your chops are your personal contribution to the ensemble. The stronger your foundation, the more you contribute to the ensemble. Chops may be built by practicing physically demanding music, with correct technique, for long periods of time. Your chops and your rhythmic foundation cannot be built in a day. It is a long, continual process.

### We Need Thinkers:

Playing well will take a very high level of concentration to achieve consistently. Just like your chops, your concentration level can not be built over a short period of time. It is a continual growth that also needs to be practiced. It starts with small things. How many reps can you get through before you break, re-grip, or make a mistake? Always be trying to push your mental limit as well as your physical limit. Being able to think at a very high level, for a long period of time will get you through those long rehearsal days. It will also make your mind more limber in the sense that you will handle changes better and quicker. With all of this, be careful as well, to not get constipation from concentration. You can think too hard, which will also cause you to falter. Be mindful on both ends. Don't be caught not thinking, while not allowing yourself to make it any harder than it is by thinking too much.

Please let us know if you have any questions! We are excited to meet you.

Josh Nelson, Colts Percussion Caption Head, [joshnelsonmusic@yahoo.com](mailto:joshnelsonmusic@yahoo.com)

# Colts 2020 Cymbal Technique Packet

## **Introduction**

Cymbal technique has always varied greatly from line to line throughout the marching activity. What is unique about cymbals is the amount of techniques that can be successfully applied on the instrument. This makes it difficult to argue that one technique, or style, is in some way better than the other.

With that in mind, this is a collection of what we at The Colts believe to be the most effective technique, both visually and musically. The following packet will provide sufficient explanation of the application of our basic technique. This packet will not cover everything, as the uniqueness of the instrument is constant innovation and growth from season to season. With a strong technical foundation you will be able to add to that growth and innovation.

Danielle Cuning, Colts Cymbal Line, [dmcunning@gmail.com](mailto:dmcunning@gmail.com)

## **Grip**

There are a variety of grips that exist for holding marching cymbals. The proper one depends on the application, whether visual or musical. The fundamental grip detailed below will be the assumed started point for all further applications in this packet, and will allow for further transitions to other styles.

“The Garfield grip”

- Hold the cymbal in a vertical position and put your hand through the strap up to the wrist, with the palm facing the bell of the cymbal.
- Turn the hand so the palm is facing away from the pad of the cymbal
- Rotate the entire hand downward and turn the palm toward the cymbal until it touches the pad. The strap should rest at the base of the thumb and forefinger.

## **Straps and Knots**

Strapping material can vary greatly from leather, to cotton, to various plastic fibers. The program and type of visual applications will dictate what strap works best. The current best overall strap is made of 1 inch flat nylon webbing. This material is cheap, durable, comfortable, and resists sticking to the wrist. Nylon is also resistant to most stretching which can lead to fraying. Currently no company's produce nylon strapping made to these specifications, so strapping must be ordered and handmade. This allows for customization based on hand and finger size, as well as further customization through tail length, and demand of visual program.

Knots, use of pennies, tape, or leather stoppers, will vary depending on its validity in the program. The basic knot however, will be the same. Tightness of strapping will again, depend on the demands of the visual program. In certain cases it is appropriate to have the strap tightened down so that the palm is flush with the pad, this is mostly true of beginning performers who do not yet have the finger strength or dexterity to firmly control the cymbal. As the performer advances looser straps can be used, and may need to be used based on visual demand.

## **Posture**

How a cymbal player looks is generally a reflection of how they feel as a performer. Having correct posture and putting physical energy into every rep creates fatigue, but a great performer is able to show their respect and enjoyment of the instrument through body language and facial expression. The audience will be affected by how the performer looks before they ever hear a note, or see the first flip up. A relaxed, confident approach should be maintained at all times.

Starting from the feet and working your way up; two thirds of the body weight should be centered over the platforms of the feet, ankles should be steady over the feet, (do not pronate or supinate the feet) ankle bones in line, knees are centered over the ankles, flex the quadriceps to lift and support the knee caps, legs are straight with no knee bend (take care to note that this does not mean locking the knee,) hips are centered over the knees and tucked under to keep the spine aligned, core muscles are engaged to control any initiation with the upper body, the chest is open (this is achieved by pulling the shoulders back and feeling a pinch between the shoulder blades,) the shoulders are rolled back and down away from the ears for a relaxed but aggressive presence, pull the elbow up slightly and roll them outwards, keeping the hands relaxed. The chin should be 10 degrees above parallel. This posture creates a confident presence, and creates the ability for potential energy to be used to explode into any visual application.

## **Etiquette**

Proper, cohesive rehearsal etiquette is the most effective way for a line to improve and get the most out of the time spent as a whole.

- The standby position is a must to keep minds engaged, and energy cohesive throughout the line. The performer should never go to standby until they are physically and mentally prepared to perform the rep. The feet should be shoulder width apart, with cymbals locked together through the pads in front of the waist. Labels and logos should be lined up, with a slight bend at the elbows to maintain an aggressive presence.

- A unison “set” command is also important for professionalism and instructor to student communication. From standby, the “set” command signals the performer to move to set with the cymbals and the feet on count 3. “Set” 2, 3, is the sequence. This should happen at an internalized 130 BPM, and a clean zing from the line will be heard on beat 3.
- The line break will come from right most side of the line, and from the neutral set position will be an inwards flip rippled from the right to left hands sequentially down the line. This can change based on what position we are breaking from.

## **Positions**

The idea throughout the following basic positions is to maintain the same degree bend in the elbow. This helps not only muscle memory, but cleanliness. All positions maintain a straight line from elbow through the middle finger, with no break in the wrist.

### **“Set”**

Set position is the basic “attention” for a cymbal player. The cymbals will be parallel to each other, 1 inch from the thighs. Arms will be almost straight down, with the exception of the elbows being slightly pulled up and back. The wrists, forearms, fingers and elbow hold the weight of the cymbals in set position.

### **“Gumption”**

Cymbals should be sternum level and parallel, with 1 inch between the knots. Edges should be even all around, with no offset. Cymbals should be slightly flatter than a seatbelt angle, with a 135 degree bend to the elbow. There should be a straight line from your middle finger up through your elbow, with no break in the wrist. Any deviation from this straight line can lead to tendonitis or other wrist and arm pain further along in a performer’s career.

### **“Vertical”**

Vertical is defined by knots at the eyes and parallel cymbals, 1 inch apart. The bicep, in most cases, will be parallel to the ground, with a 135 degree angle in the

elbow, maintaining knots at the eyes. Pinkies will be away from the face. Keep the chest open, shoulders pulled back and elbows in the same plane as the shoulders. From the vertical position we will be using the A and V positions for crashes. Maintaining the same vertical height, the A will open up to the outer edges of the performers shoulders, with a 1 inch space between the top edges of the cymbals, top edges even. The first V will open up again to the outer edges of the performer's shoulders, with a 1 inch displacement at the bottom, right above left. The release V will open up to the outer edges of the performers shoulders, with the bottom edges being even, 1 inch of space between. In both cases the thumbs should remain at eye level, with only the outer edges of the cymbals being visible to a spectator.

## **Flips**

Cymbal flips are wrist rotations used to add visual interest when moving to various positions. We do not implement the use of arm or elbow in our flip technique. Elbows should maintain their 135 degree bend throughout the completion of the flip. The major players in our flip technique are fingers, fulcrum, wrist and forearm. There are two basic flips, as the human wrist can only rotate in two directions, in flips and out flips. The definitions below will explain an "in flip" from set to vertical and an "out flip" from vertical to set. Both can be implemented to various positions and in various planes. We will use both flips throughout our technique program.

### **"In Flips"**

Start at set. Practice the initial pathway by moving the cymbals in a straight line path to vertical. This is the path the arms will always take, while maintaining the 135 degree bend in the elbow. The actual flip happens in the wrists only. Begin by pushing the thumb in towards the center of the body and rotating the wrist around so the cymbal flashes frontwards. From there the cymbals should be at the chest finishing the rotation by closing into vertical from thumbs to pinkies. The rotation will last from the initiation of the arm to the resolution and should not involve the elbows.

### **"Out Flips"**

From vertical pull the cymbals down to the sternum maintaining a 1 inch separation. From here the arms will move straight to set. The sternum is where the flip begins. The pinky will push up and slightly in towards the center of the body so the cymbals lie upside down, then continue the rotation to allow the cymbals to flash frontwards, at the break of the rotation it is necessary to let go slightly and maintain control of the cymbal through the fulcrum, continue the rotation into set. This rotation happens within a smaller space than an in rotation because of the pull down initiation.

We are using gravity to help us complete the rotation and essentially catching the cymbal in its set position. This allows for a fuller and faster rotation than the wrist can complete on its own.

## **Musical Implements**

Every implement on the instrument can be boiled down to two sounds: a long or short sound. The idea is to not sacrifice fullness and quality for a shorter sound. The depth of sound should remain, even though the amount of time the sound exists is shorter. Having fullness of sound is often easier with longer sounds (ie Crashes or sizzles,) and developing the right touch and finesse through the application of longer sounds will help transfer to shorter sounds (ie Crash chokes or presses.)

### **“Vertical crash”**

This crash utilizes the A, V and vertical positions. When playing a crash on beat 1 after an 8 beat count off the sequence is as follows:

### **A V A V reset (all at vertical)**

#### **7 8 1 2+ 3**

Pop to an A on 7 then pop to a displace V position on 8, these are the prep counts where no contact will be made. The crash is a flam from the bottom then top edge making contact all on one count. The A is then held with tension until the upbeat of 2 when the cymbals pop back to the even V position, finally resetting back to vertical on beat 3. This sequence serves two purposes. First, it adds a visual sequence to all crashes giving motion to the sound and physical visual notes to keep the performers in time. Second, and more importantly, using the AV technique sets the performer up to play a flam on the cymbals, resulting in a warm, full sound quality. If the edges are pushed together simultaneously then an air pocket will be made, sucking up sound production and resulting in a door slam sound.

### **“Key concepts”**

- There will be an instant on count 1 where the cymbals will be at vertical while passing between the prep V and A.
- The A where tension is held after count 1 should be pulled apart as if a rubber band were between the cymbals. The top edges will not pull past 1 inch apart at any given point.

- Fingers should come off the cymbals after the crash and not return until the last V.
- The arm should move as little as possible throughout.
- Keep the motions simple, but explosive.

#### “Vertical Crash Choke”

A crash choke follows the same sequence as a vertical crash, except it stops at the second A. After the bottom top contact is made choke off the A at the edges between the shoulders and the pec muscles, top edges right below the chin, even with 1 inch of space between. There are three points of contact when dampening the sound from the cymbals, they happen in this quick succession; fingertips, forearms, body. Lastly, on count 3, push back out to vertical.

#### **A V A reset (all at vertical)**

**7 8 1 3**

#### “Key concepts”

- The crash choke should be approached no different than a normal crash. First there is a full crash, and then a dampening of sound.
- The choke must always be aggressive for visual clarity and to ensure the sound does not ring after the choke.

#### “Gumption Crash”

Crashing from gumption has less steps than its vertical counterpart, and we use this more in our playing technique for a few different reasons. The gumption position allows for the performer to express him or herself more through facial expression and body language, as the position opens up the face and shoulders.

The sequence is as follows

#### **Prep Out Reset (all at gumption)**

**8 1 3**

The prep for a gumption crash pulls the cymbals apart from a hinge point at the front edge of the cymbals. Push in with the wrists and fingers and allow the elbows to open



slightly wider. The back edge closest to the body will touch the forearms through the prep. The right cymbal will be at a steeper angle than the left at this point. The left hand will only break inward toward the body at the wrist for the prep, while the right will break inward toward the body and pull up and back slightly with the elbow and arm. The right cymbal will not cover the face through the prep. To crash, push the right cymbal front first into the left and let the left cymbal react by moving back to gumption. At this point the edge closest to the body will make contact for the second part of the flam. Push with the right until the arm is fully extended in front but still parallel with the left cymbal at gumption. On count 3, pull the right back into gumption.

#### “Key concepts”

- The cymbals should never pull back towards the body, only opening laterally.
- Keep the fingers off through the crash until the reset to allow full sound production.

#### “Gumption Crash Choke”

The gumption crash choke only differs after the crash is made. As soon as contact is made with both front and back edges of the cymbals, the right hand will stop moving out. The cymbals will be pulled into a dampened position against the body. The top edge will be under the armpits, the bottom edge will stay attached at the waist. This also uses the three points of contact used in a vertical crash choke to dampen the sound (fingertips, forearms, body,) maintain the forearm and finger contact in the choke position, push back out to gumption on beat 3.

#### “Key concepts”

- Remember to always move with staccato energy in and back out.
- Get a quality crash sound before moving into the body choke.

#### “Gumption Tap”

From the gumption dampened choke position, pull the cymbals slightly off the body. This will be the position you will tap from. The right cymbal will be both the striking implement, as well as the cymbal producing the sound. The dynamic of the tap will determine the prep angle for the tap. For now we will define the angle levels, as pressure will also play a part in the dynamic. We will use 3, 6, or 9 to define tap and tap choke preps. A level 3 prep from the set tap position is a slight lift with the right hand. A level 6 prep has the cymbal at a prep parallel to the side of the body, where the spectator sees only the outer edge of the cymbal. A level 9 prep has the right cymbal parallel to the left cymbal (this is the most common prep for gumption taps and tap chokes). Dynamics can be changed by using different pressure through the hands with each prep level. After the prep, strike the left cymbal with the right, about 1 inch from

the edge of the right cymbal. Allow the tap to ring through the right cymbal by pulling the fingers off.

The sequence is as follows

**Prep    Contact    Reset (at gumption)**

**8            1            3 (back out to gumption)**

“Key concepts”

- Make sure that both the prep and release are staccato.
- The striking cymbal in this case is also the resonating cymbal.
- Pull the fingers off after contact to allow for a full sound.

“Gumption Tap Choke”

As with the gumption tap we will use a three level prep system, which will depend on the dynamic. For now, assume that we are doing a level 9 prep, which is *f-ff*. From the gumption position you will pop down to the level 9 prep (as detailed above) on beat 8. After the prep you will strike the left cymbal with the right, about 1 inch from the edge of the right cymbal. From there you will pull both cymbals in to the gumption crash choke position to dampen. The same dampen sequence applies (fingertips, forearm, body,) while making sure to get the proper amount of rebound from the right cymbal off of the left cymbal to allow for a full and bright tap sound before the dampen. After the dampen you will pop back out to gumption on beat 3.

The sequence is as follows

**Prep    Contact and dampen    Reset (all at gumption)**

**8            1            3**

“Key concepts”

- Make sure that both the prep and push out are staccato.
- Allow for appropriate rebound for fuller brighter sound.
- Dampen off completely with all three points of contact.

“Sizzles”

Sizzles are of the long sound variety and involve placing the cymbals together with the appropriate amount of pressure to allow the ridges of the cymbals to vibrate, producing a “sizz” like sound. There is no prep for a sizzle, and the implement can be

played at a variety of different positions, or allow for movement through a visual phrase while sustaining the sound. From the desired position, drop the cymbals together with the appropriate amount of pressure to produce the sound. The pressure will be determined by length of the sustain and dynamic. To release the sizzle either pull apart back to 1 inch with the fingertips muting, or press them off with both hands to create a press off sound. The release will be determined by the scoring.

### “Presses”

Presses are essentially a shorter version of a sizzle. The implement utilizes both the ridges and bell of the cymbal to produce a sound akin to a drumset “hi hat.” There is no prep for a press, the performer simply presses both cymbals together from a set position. From the gumption set position, the performer will slightly displace the right cymbal down the angle and towards themselves, then, using the same amount of pressure from both hands they will press the cymbals together. The use of the pectoral muscles for pressure helps to eliminate the cymbals catching too much air between the palms, and most of the pressure should come from the fingertips and meaty base of the fingertips. Be careful not to use too much pressure through the center of the palms, as this will create an air pocket, producing more of a low pitched “thud” sound, when we are going for a high pitched “chit” sound. To release the press the performer will pull the cymbals back to their 1 inch separation, making sure to be staccato.

The sequence is as follows

### **Press    Release (at gumption)**

1.            **3**

### “Sucs”

Sucs are a short, low pitched sound that utilize the bell of each cymbal to produce an air pocket. Catching the appropriate air pocket every time requires practice and touch. Bell depth and difference can also change suc technique slightly to allow a performer to make the most out of the instrument they are playing on at any given time. These are the basics, which can be modified slightly to produce the best sound.

To prep from the gumption position, extend the right arm forward (maintain a very slight bend at this extension, do not lock the elbow,) place the edge of the right cymbal closest to the body on the left cymbal (the contact point in relation to the bell will depend on the depth of the bell) with pressure from both cymbals pull the right cymbal in towards the body, producing a deep “thud” sound. The performer will want to feel pressure through the fingertips and palms as the air pocket catches, and with the cymbals we use, the performer will feel most of the suc pressure happen through

the meaty base of the fingers. After the suc, pull the cymbals apart to their 1 inch separation.

The sequence is as follows

**Prep    Suc    Release (at gumption)**

**8        1        3**

### **Release Reloads**

A release entails the cymbal coming out of contact with the hand (ie the hand is no longer holding the cymbal in Garfield grip, and the strap is only in contact around the wrist.) A reload entails the hand returning to Garfield grip. The release and reload should use the natural movement of the cymbal due to initiation and the force of gravity. The arm should have minimal involvement in the release or the reload. These two basic concepts are the building blocks of more advanced visual phrasing and should be in any performer's basic technique breakdown.

In a basic table top release the pinky will push down and inwards, allowing the cymbal to fall off the outside of the hand. At this point the hand will be released from Garfield grip (the strap will fall out of the webbing between the thumb and forefinger) and the player will catch the cymbal in their palm, with the inside of the bell facing upwards. The arm will remain in the same position the entire time. The momentum of the release will come entirely from the pinky and outside of the hand. Any arm use will distract from the visual taking place.

In a basic reverse table top reload the cymbal will fall down and inwards, coming around the outside of the wrist, and finally landing back in Garfield grip at the table top position. In order to achieve this, the player must keep their fingers spread apart, especially the thumb and forefinger. The pathway for the cymbal will be drawn with the wrist, in an outward elliptical motion while turning the palm back over to face downward. The momentum for the cymbal will come from the motion of the wrist. The wrist will not break at any point in the reload, the straight line from the elbow through the forefinger should be maintained. There should be no motion outside of flipping the hand over.

### **Juggles**

A juggle refers to any visual where the hand is completely out of the strap, and the performer is maneuvering the cymbal around the hand and forearm in a variety of different ways. Juggles differ from tosses in the sense the performer does not lose contact with the cymbal, even though it may appear to be a toss to the spectator. The basic concept behind a juggle is using motivation from different parts of the hands and

fingers to motivate the cymbal to fall in different ways, then maneuvering the hand around the cymbal as it falls. There are a variety of different juggle concepts we will explore and develop.

### **Visual phrasing**

When developing a visual phrase as a performer, the music should always be taken into consideration. Visual phrases should add to the overall show design and never distract or detract. Looking and listening to the battery score while writing a phrase is key, as well as taking into consideration drill and field placement. When brainstorming always ask yourself, “does this add to the overall show?” Are you seeing what you’re hearing in the case of visual phrasing? If not, the phrase needs to be taken back to the drawing board. The unique part about the instrument is the performer has the opportunity to contribute to their show in a way that no other performer can. This should not be taken lightly, phrasing should be well thought out and intentional.

### **Performance**

Performance is one of the most important aspects of this activity. As a cymbal player you have the unique opportunity to perform through facial expressions and body language while playing a visual musical instrument. The line should have a distinct performance vibe, unique to the individuals on the line. A base level performance should be defined for each individual performer, as it fits within the broader picture of the line. Connection is key in performance, and can be achieved through eye contact with spectators. Performers should exude confidence and command the audience’s attention for the entirety of the performance. Moving through different vibes appropriately will be explored through exercises.

### **Physicality**

Cymbals are an extremely physically demanding instrument, performers should make sure to keep their bodies healthy in preparation for rehearsals and performances. The aim of the technique outlined in this packet is to keep performers as healthy as possible. The technique will truly save you if you let it. A great performer will always push and use energy, but many muscles used for cymbal playing are small and delicate. Therefore each performer must take it upon themselves to train and condition these muscles to be able to push through a rehearsal or practice session. If this mentality is adopted the performer will never have an easy rehearsal, but will constantly improve. Train carefully, push through the pain, but listen to the body.

## **Colts Drum & Bugle Corps Visual Audition Criteria**

Anyone auditioning for a brass or battery performance position will be evaluated in the following visual areas:

- Desire and ability to learn and implement the Colts marching style and methodology. This will include forwards and backwards march, slides, crab step, and change of direction. We will be using these skills at tempos between 100 – 220 beats per minute.
- Demonstration of body control with and without equipment.
- Understanding of dance and movement principles, as well as terminology.
- Demonstration of the ability to hold interval and understanding of form responsibility and their priorities

Please be aware the visual staff will be evaluating potential members based on the understanding you have just learned the Colts “style” of marching. We will be looking for your ability to learn, retain, and implement this technique during the visual training block(s). Your ability to take in new instructions and execute directions will weigh heaviest in our evaluations.

### **PHYSICAL FITNESS**

World class drum corps participation is an intensive, physically and mentally demanding activity. A critical factor in becoming a top performer in a world class drum and bugle corps is being physically fit and prepared to handle the exertion level necessary for success. Ability to demonstrate and develop strength and endurance in upper and lower body work, as well as utilization of good form and technique, is given significant consideration in the audition process.

Jack Borland, Colts Visual Caption Head  
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# Cymbal Key

Cymbals

Crash

Crash Choke

Sizzle

Suk

8 Hi-Hat

A-Tap

Tap Choke

Dampened Tap

16 Bell Tap

Zing

Penny Roll

Siz-Suk

22 Siz-Press

Split parts

Unison Parts

The image displays musical notation for various cymbal techniques across four staves. Each staff begins with a double bar line and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation uses various note values, rests, and accidentals to represent the techniques. The first staff, labeled 'Cymbals', shows 'Crash' (a half note with a vertical line), 'Crash Choke' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), 'Sizzle' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), and 'Suk' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle). The second staff, labeled 'Cym.', shows 'Hi-Hat' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), 'A-Tap' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), 'Tap Choke' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), and 'Dampened Tap' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle). The third staff, labeled 'Cym.', shows 'Bell Tap' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), 'Zing' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), 'Penny Roll' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), and 'Siz-Suk' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle). The fourth staff, labeled 'Cym.', shows 'Siz-Press' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), 'Split parts' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle), and 'Unison Parts' (a half note with a vertical line and a small triangle).

# Cymbal Check Patterns

2020 Colts

Cymbals

8's

8

8

Triplets

13

13

18

18

23

23

28

28

16ths

33

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5lets

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50