

## A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF ORCHESTRAL PERCUSSION TRAINING

### Level I: Percussion Skills and Concepts

#### IV. Xylophone, Bells

- movements - horizontal and vertical

- phrases, groups of notes, gestures

- sense of larger pulses

#### *follow-up ideas*

- ✓ connections!
- ✓ xylophone vs. bells - "touch sensitivity"
- ✓ tambourine vs. world hand-drumming styles - "horizontal vs vertical"
- ✓ snare drum vs. timpani - note lengths

#### Preparation for V. Performances

performances of solos, studies, or excerpts of students' choice on snare drum, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, xylophone, or bells

## THE STACCATO AND LEGATO APPROACH

Many problems result from the physical characteristics of the mallet instruments themselves. Foremost of these problems is the fact that there is no way to produce a natural sustained tone (except on vibraphone or bells) other than the quasi sustained sound produced by trills or rolls. Consequently, we should acquire a technique which will enable us to project a legato feeling when desired even though it is impossible to have a legato sound in the true sense of the word.

It has been my observation that too many mallet players have limited their potential velocity by a strictly staccato approach to their instruments. Consider the basic individual hand, wrist and arm motion. If the mallets are held tightly, and short, sharp wrist motions are used the only possible results can be sounds of a staccato nature. While this would be valuable in developing the wrist muscles, if used exclusively it can and will greatly inhibit the player's flexibility and ultimate speed. However, if the stick is allowed a little more freedom within the handgrip and smoother, relaxed wrist motions are used, the player will then be able to feel and project a smoother, more legato-like style. It is through this kind of approach to the instrument that the greatest degree of velocity can be obtained. Most of the material in this book was written to help the player develop this legato approach.

This legato technique is perhaps of more value to the jazz player than almost any other single facet of his technique. Jazz has a more legato than staccato feeling and the extensive use of staccato will immediately destroy any possible jazz concept and, in fact, will hinder the feeling of phrasing in general in any music.

At this point let us emphasize the importance and value of staccato technique, which is often a necessity to the player when he must "punch out" an orchestral passage to reinforce other sections of the orchestra. It was not my intention to minimize the value of the staccato technique.

## PHRASING, STRESSED NOTES AND ACCENTS

Many mallet players should place more emphasis on phrasing instead of thinking and attacking each note as a separate entity. Phrasing gives a sense of direction to music and all music must have this forward motion to keep it from becoming lifeless and monotonous!

In each individual phrase the direction is arrived at through the use of dynamics, accents and weighted or stressed notes, either at the beginning, within and/or at the end of each phrase. Almost every note within a given phrase has to lean toward another note or fall away from a previous one. If all the notes in any phrase are played separately, independent of each other, without any kind of dynamic inflection, the phrase will have no direction. The nature of Mallet instruments makes the use of accents, stressed or weighted notes most important not only to emphasize strong notes, but to imply length to notes of longer value.

There are both staccato accents and legato accents and we can, even on a dry-sounding xylophone, differentiate to some degree between the two. Staccato accents are directly attacked and/or bitten off while legato accents should be leaned on and fallen away from. Accents occurring within a phrase, especially in jazz, should be treated as weighted or stressed notes and the legato type accent should be applied in most cases.

### What one should learn about playing the xylophone through these types of pieces

- Playing with a linear understanding solidifies a more general sense of “playing in a melodic manner”
- Develops the skill to “play” with note lengths and display inflections in rhythm; how to make notes seem longer on such a dry instrument and how to make the rhythms more dance like
- Creating or using the rebound
- “Playing the points” for better understanding of phrasing and rhythmic structure through rhythmic vitality and natural strong and weak pulses while keeping in mind a particular musical era
- How to play accents by adding arm weight to adjust color and note length so as to not simply “hit” harder making the note sound shorter
- Consider the construction and lay out of the keyboard through exploring “riffs”, rhythms, repetitions that end up acting like “rudiments” and visual patterns on the instrument
- Through unusual sticking or adjustments, better keyboard facility will develop
- Improvement in reading skills short of memorizing all keyboard parts
- Improved kinesthetic aspect of playing and general movement at the instrument
- Discover the sense of “feel” that can be created by mixing various elements
- Playing melody primarily with one voice while accompanying or “comping” with the other hand such as in double stop passages
- Basic harmonic progressions and the often-used arpeggio
- Recognizing the universality of the “2<sup>nd</sup> note of the double” idea
- A chance to play many notes and actively condition for smaller passages such as excerpts
- Connecting the mechanics for playing music from the Golden Age of the xylophone to classical “orchestral” repertoire
- Playing this style of music makes the player also a part of the historical legacy and significance of why this instrument had a Golden Age in the first place.

Survey

left hand

pp. 30, 31  
p. 42, ex. 6  
p. 55 (l.h. rebound)  
p. 57, ex. 5  
p. 61, ex. 5 (l.h. lead)  
p. 99 (l.h. development)  
p. 130

right hand

p. 32 (r.h. voicing)  
p. 42, ex. 5  
p. 55 (r.h. rebound)  
p. 57, ex. 4  
p. 83, 1R, 2R  
p. 84 (don't look down; devote time to this study)  
p. 104  
p. 129  
pp. 135, 136 (style; arm weight)

double stops

pp. 36-39  
p. 44, ex. 3R  
p. 65 (Blues - eighth note rag feel)  
pp. 66, 67  
p. 68 (Rag - double stops)  
p. 71 (Rag - relaxed big motion for double stops)  
p. 81, ex. 4  
p. 111  
p. 120, ex. 3  
p. 140, ex. 7  
p. 147 (use as double stop/rebound exercise)  
p. 149

patterns/scales

- p. 39, ex. 5, 6 (play line)
- p. 42, ex. 4
- p. 81, ex. 3
- p. 81, ex. 6 (physical motion)
- p. 82
- p. 120, ex. 2 (great for rebound)

arpeggios

- p. 60, ex. 1, 2
- p. 69
- p. 70, ex. 7 (throw sticks down; rebound)
- p. 81, ex. 5 (relax, light touch)
- p. 88
- pp. 96, 97
- pp. 117-119
- p. 123

chromatics

- p. 43, ex. 8 (use of rebound)

grace notes

- pp. 48-50
- p. 95 (main note sounds)
- pp. 126-128 (grace note technique)

style ("feel good stuff")

- p. 56
- p. 73 (slap tongue, accents)
- p. 74
- p. 79
- p. 106 ("don't lose melody when ragging")
- pp. 121, 122 (march feel)
- p. 125
- pp. 131-134
- p. 137
- pp. 150-160

George Hamilton Green: Instruction Course for Xylophone

\*Focus Areas

From the Survey

Left Hand

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p. 99 (l.h. development)

p. 130

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p. 140, ex. 7

p. 149

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pp. 96, 97

p. 123

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p. 95 (main note sounds)

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\*finding the *Highlights* by narrowing down the...

G.H.Green Xylophone Survey