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GROVER PRO PERCUSSION®

Percussion Primer *by Neil Grover* | TAMBOURINE

SELECTION

The tambourine is available in many sizes and jingle configurations. Most importantly, for concert playing, a tambourine with a quality skin head is essential! Headless “rock” tambourines are not a viable substitute. I suggest a general purpose 10” diameter quality tambourine with a double row of bright sounding jingles. Of course it is always beneficial to have a few instruments with a range of sound characteristics available.

GRIP

Hold the tambourine with a firm, yet flexible grip. Remember, the instrument needs to vibrate when struck. Right handed players should hold the tambourine in the left hand and strike with the right. Maximum clarity and articulation is achieved by holding the tambourine parallel to the floor. Maximum jingle resonance is achieved by holding the tambourine vertically. For general playing, the tambourine should be held at a 45 degree angle.

STROKE

THREE FINGERS - general playing (pp-mf).

FOUR FINGERS - strong playing (f).

CLOSED FIST - very aggressive playing (ff-ffff).

ROLLS - played by shaking with grip hand or using thumb (friction) roll.

EXTRA SOUND

The tambourine can easily produce unwanted sounds if not handled with care. Be careful not to create unnecessary jingle sound when handling the tambourine during performance!

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GROVER PRO PERCUSSION®

Percussion Primer *by Neil Grover* | TRIANGLE

SELECTION

The triangle should be the highest, non-pitched member of the percussion family. Sizes range from 4” to 10”; however, the best size for concert playing is between 6” and 9”. A larger triangle provides a bigger internal working area for easier execution; however, it is heavier and more difficult to control. Triangles are made from steel, brass or bronze, each producing a different sonority.

SUSPENSION

A triangle needs to be suspended so that it vibrates unencumbered and freely, allowing maximum overtone resonance to be produced. It is very important that the instrument be suspended using a very thin, yet strong, mono-filament line. Fishing line works great and is also inexpensive. The use of string, cable, shoelaces, etc. will effectively dampen the resonance of any triangle. Using a second “catch line” will prevent the triangle from falling to the floor, should the primary line break. A light “triangle clip” will allow the triangle to be mounted on a music stand when not in use.

STROKE

The triangle should never be played when mounted on a music stand. It should always be held at eye level and struck on the bottom leg with a motion that “pushes away” the bottom leg. This method will produce the maximum overtone sonority. A triangle sound full of overtones will blend with other instruments. Remember, a triangle is a non-pitched instrument and should have a very lush array of overtones, it should not sound like a bell!

BEATERS

Beaters are available in a large variety of sizes (diameters), materials and shapes. For general playing, a set of at least three steel beaters in various diameters and a length of 8-9” is recommended. Various size beaters will produce different sonorities. As in all percussion instruments, a smaller beater produces a thinner sound while a heavier beater creates a big sonority. Generally speaking, thinner beaters are used when playing at softer dynamic levels.

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GROVER PRO PERCUSSION®

Percussion Primer *by Neil Grover* | BASS DRUM

TUNING

The bass drum is the lowest sounding, non-pitched member of the drum family. It should sound noticeably lower than any other instrument. Think of it as a non-pitched extension of the timpani. Tune the resonating (ringing) head slightly higher than batter (striking) head. Check for loose tension rods and any other “rattles”.

PLAYING AREA

GENERAL	- half way between edge and center.
STACCATO	- in center.
LEGATO	- near edge.

STROKE

Pull sound out of drum! Use wrist AND arm motion with upstroke. Marches use short stokes near center using mainly wrist. Rolls use 2 mallets spread apart rolling slowly using wrist only!

MUFFLING

Use the right knee and left hand. For very short strokes leave knee on head while striking. (Lefties use left knee/right hand). Do not dampen the concert bass drum with tape on the head, or any muffling item placed inside the shell. Remember, the concert bass drum should sound very low and resonant!

INSTRUMENT SIZE

Bass drums are available in many different sizes. It is important to choose a drum that is proportionally suitable for the player. For younger students, a 28” diameter drum is suitable. For older players, a 32”-36” diameter drum works best.

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GROVER PRO PERCUSSION®

Percussion Primer *by Neil Grover* | CYMBALS

SELECTION

Cymbals are instruments of great coloristic expression. While they can add a brilliance of sound unlike any other instrument, they must be played with care and musicality. It is imperative that cymbals be chosen for sound and manageability. For younger students, a pair of 17" medium-light cymbals is recommended. For high school players, addition of medium 19' cymbals is appropriate. For maximum resonance only soft leather straps should be used! The addition of leather pads can also aid in cymbal handling. Wooden handles or soft "furry" pads are not acceptable in the concert hall!

GRIP

Cymbals should be held in a relaxed, yet controllable manner. The wrists should never be inserted through the strap, rather, the strap should be held between the thumb and pointer finger, with the other fingers supporting the pointer. Imagine turning a key in a car door, ending with the thumb on top. This is exactly the way the cymbal strap is held.

STROKE

Hold both cymbals together with the top edge at eye level. Slowly separate the cymbals, keeping them closer for soft crashes and farther apart for loud crashes. Using a flam motion bring the cymbals together and instantly pull them apart. Very soft crashes are played by lightly "scraping" the cymbals together. Many students have trouble playing soft crashes and resort to touching the edges at a perpendicular angle. This is not acceptable!

MUFFLING

Cymbals commonly have to be muffled, especially for short accent notes. This is accomplished by bringing the cymbals into the chest area after striking together.

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CREATIVE TAMBOURINE TECHNIQUE

or

Everything you wanted to know about tambourine playing, but were afraid to ask!

by Neil W. Grover

It is surprising to me that so few percussion students take the practice of percussion accessories seriously. I can honestly say that in over fifteen years as a professional I have been required to play tambourine and triangle more often than marimba. Yet most students fail to devote *any time* to the preparation of accessory playing. Why not spend some time mastering these instruments *as well as* snare drum, marimba and timpani? Don't fool yourself into thinking that once given a demanding tambourine part you can just pick up the nearest tambourine and instantly do a credible job! It has been my experience to see more than a few players fumble over standard tambourine parts.

The purpose of this article is to outline some of the unusual techniques I have acquired, developed, and refined over a number of years. I'm writing with the assumption that most percussionists know how to execute a smooth thumb roll. If not, go back to the practice room and master this technique, or if need be find a good teacher and take a lesson or two. You'll be glad you did.

HOLDING THE TAMBOURINE - ANGLE OF ATTACK

Most players give no thought to the proper way a tambourine is held. Unlike other instruments a tambourine is not stationary, in fact, it's sound quality changes depending on how it is held! Try this, hold a tambourine in a horizontal position (parallel to the floor) and tap the head. Now turn it to a vertical orientation (perpendicular to floor) and tap it again. Notice the great change in tonality! *Rule #1 - A tambourine sounds most articulate when held in a horizonal orientation.* When holding your tambourine don't mindlessly hold it at the same angle of attack for every situation! To demonstrate proper use of this concept let's take the opening of Bizet's *Carmen Suite* (ex. #1). Start this excerpt holding the instrument almost fully perpendicular to the floor. This will start you off with a big, full sound and since it is at *FF* dynamic level articulation is no problem. Use a closed fist in the center of the head. In the 9th bar (where indicated) shift to using your fingertips and as you diminuendo move from the center of the head to the edge. *At the same time* gradually change your angle of attack to a more horizontal position. This should result in a nice articulate sonority all the way down to the softest dynamic level.

CRADLING

Another technique I use is called *cradling* the tambourine. Tchaikovsky's *Arabic Dance* from the *Nutcracker* (ex. #2) is a situation where this technique works well. Hold your hand open, palm face up and extend your fingers as though you were holding a basketball. Then place (cradle) the tambourine on top of your fingertips. Lightly tap the edge of the head (it is OK to play directly on top of the rim). Notice how articulate, dry and clear the resultant sound is. Now try playing the *Arabic Dance*. This should be practiced so that each and every articulation sounds clean and even. By *cradling* the instrument you help to produce this clear sonority.

THUMB ROLL WITH HEEL RELEASE

While every good percussionist can play a thumb roll, few know how to articulate the end of a roll. Any good roll should have an attack, sustain and release, yet most percussionists neglect the latter. Sometimes an articulated release is called for. This is achieved by snapping the wrist down into the head as an articulated end to the roll (see ex. #3 with diagrams). If it helps, think about learning to play open stroke rolls on snare drum. You want to produce a clear articulated end to the roll. An excerpt from Stravinsky's *Petrushka* is a good example for application of heel release. The opening eighth note rolls should end with an accented articulation produced with the heel. This technique may take some time to develop to the point of being able to execute this passage.

FINGER ROLL

While the thumb roll is an indispensable technique, sometimes a lighter, more delicate roll is required. This is where the finger roll has its place. Using the middle finger, (it can actually be executed with any finger), produce a roll similar in style and execution to the thumb roll (see diagram ex. #4). The middle finger, however, has less weight and carries less hand mass behind it than the thumb, thus producing a lighter sonority. Make sure you *support* the middle finger with the thumb. After practicing this for a while add the heel release and you'll have a technique which makes

the execution of *Danse Boheme* from Bizet's *Carmen* (ex. #4) easier to play. Keep in mind, this whole excerpt should be soft and delicate. Play all rolls with the middle finger, release them with the heel (be careful not to accent these) and play all other notes with the fingertip of the middle finger. Remember, light and delicate!

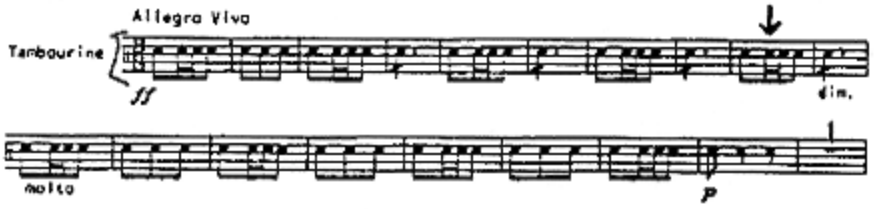
RIGHT HANDED SHAKE ROLL

Sometimes it is very difficult to produce a long, sustained shake roll. Try this, holding your tambourine with one hand try to play a very long shake roll from p to ff to p. If you can execute this without problem, *my hat's off to you!* If you're like me, this is very difficult to execute. One solution to this problem is the execution of a R.H. Shake Roll (L.H. Shake Roll for lefties). To execute this roll hold the tambourine in a vertical orientation with the left hand, place the right hand pointer and middle fingers on the bottom (6 o'clock position) edge of the instrument. Using a very slight, rapid, back and forth motion of the right hand allow the tambourine to vibrate back and forth with the right hand fingers. Gradually increase the right hand shaking pressure, getting louder until the left hand takes over the motion. The point of transfer between hands should be inaudible (this will take a lot of practice). The benefits of this technique are found in the ability to play very long, sustained rolls from piano to forte. When you master this and are starting to feel "cocky", try reversing the motion and going from loud to soft. This should return you to reality!

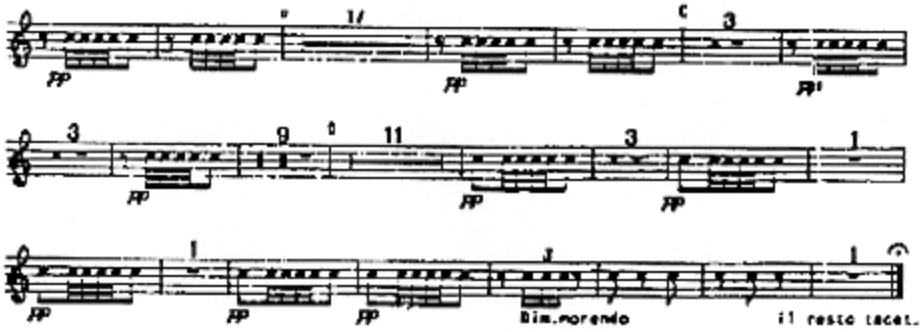
RIGHT HANDED PIVOT ARTICULATION

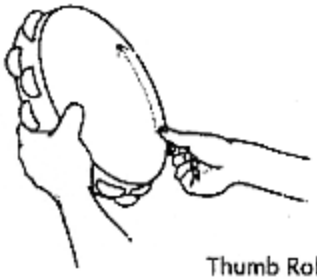
This technique is useful for execution of very fast, articulated passages. Before getting into execution we must discuss concept for a moment. Imagine two bananas

Example #1 *Carmen* – Entracte



Example #2 *Nutcracker* – Arabic Dance

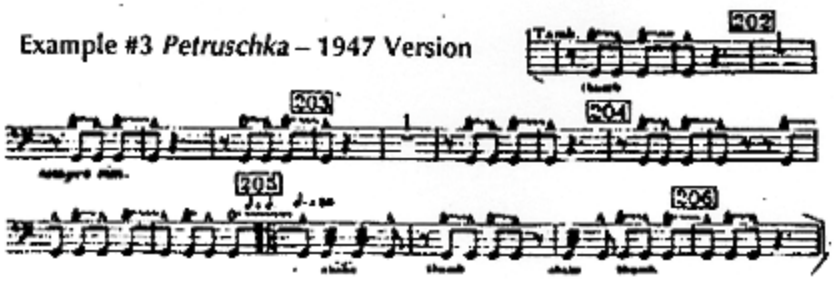


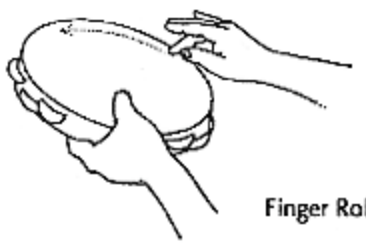


Thumb Roll

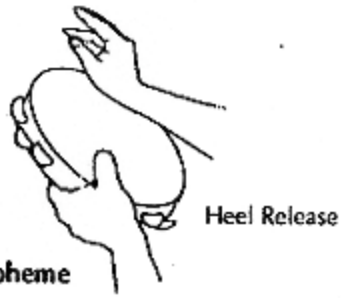
Heel Release

Example #3 *Petruschka* – 1947 Version



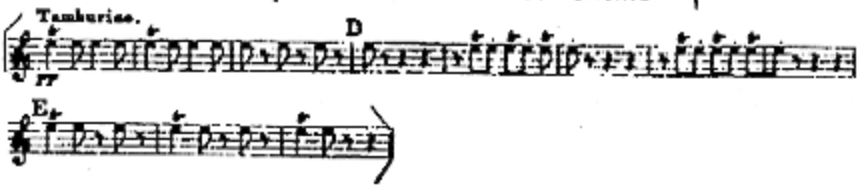


Finger Roll

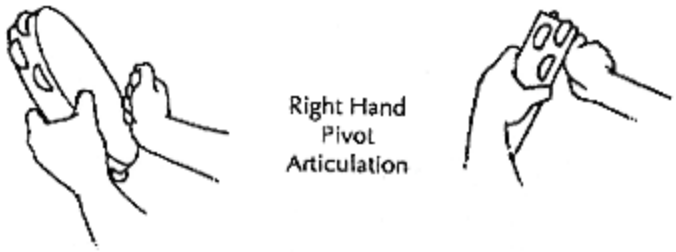


Heel Release

Example #4 *Carmen* – Danse Boheme

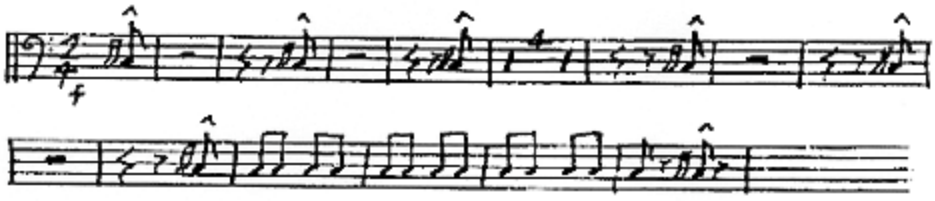


held together, curved inward toward each other (). This should be used as a mental image for proper execution of this technique. Keeping this image in your mind hold the tambourine in the left hand at a 45 degree (or less) angle to perpendicular. Resting the bottom, fleshy part of you right fist on the bottom edge (6 o'clock position) of the instrument, slowly pivot both hands in an arcing motion (think of the bananas), until the top of the fist meets the top of the tambourine (see diagram ex. #5). Now slowly pivot back to the starting position. Practice this pivoting motion using a metronome set at quarter note = 60. Practice playing quarter, then eighth, then eighth triplet, then sixteenth notes. Once this is mastered go on to the *Roman Carnival Overture* (ex. #5). Play the *first six notes* with the right hand fist in the middle of the head, then play the last three notes using *Right Hand Pivot Articulation.*



Example #5 *Roman Carnival Overture*

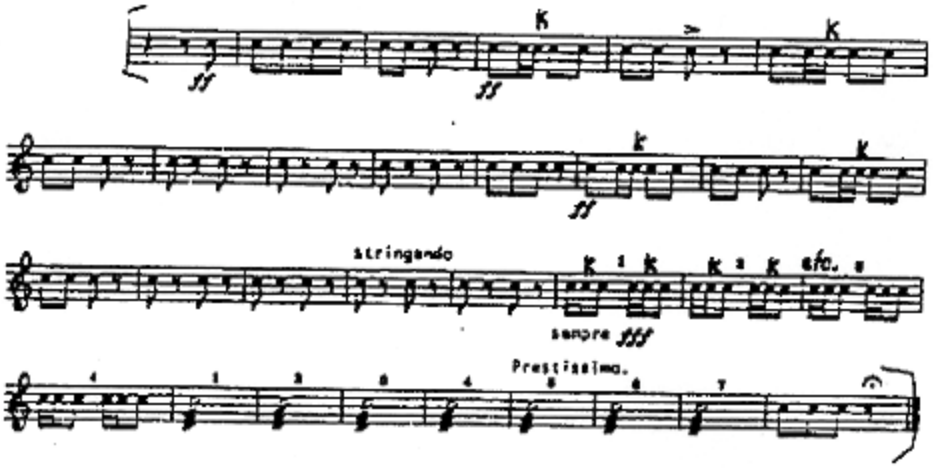
Example #6 *Gaite Parisiane*



EXECUTION OF GRACE NOTES

While not common, grace notes are most difficult to execute accurately on tambourine. The technique I use is a permutation of the technique used by Brazilian pandeiro players. Holding the tambourine stiffly (no wrist motion) in the left hand, snap the left arm (and tambourine) up about 1-2 inches. Using a sharp motion, snap it back down to the original position. This should create two equal sounding notes. Practice this motion, getting quicker, so that the two notes sound close together. Then end the phrase with a sharp right hand articulation. While the technique I use is a modification of this, it is based on this motion. Try executing *Offenbach's Gaite Parisiane* excerpt (ex. #6). The two grace notes are executed by just the up/down motion of the tambourine, while the main note is played with the right hand.

Example #7 *Nutcracker* – Trepak



FIST / KNEE ARTICULATION

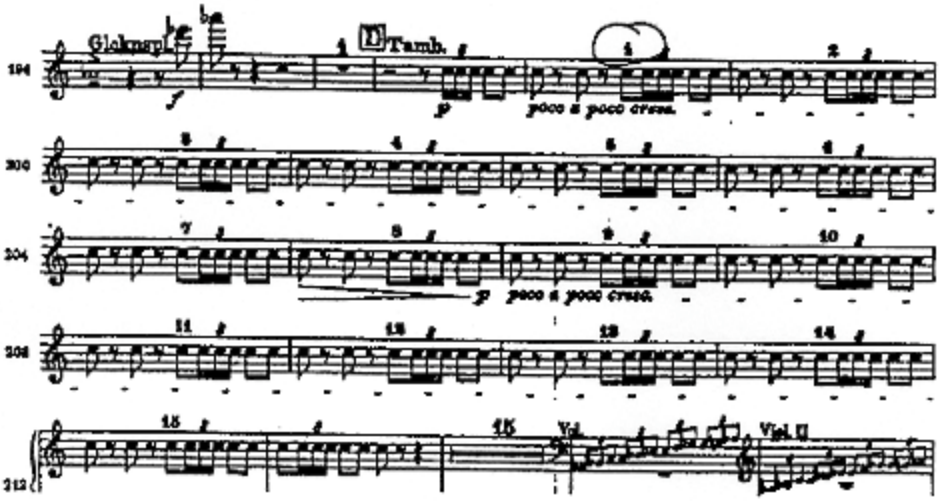
This is a standard technique used by most percussionists to rapidly play articulated passages. Holding the instrument inverted (upside down), alternate strokes between the knee and fist (see diagram ex.#7). It helps to hold the tambourine in a stiff, horizontal manner. Use a chair to elevate your knee (I don't recommend trying this poised on one leg looking like an ostrich)! Once you're feeling confident, try the excerpt from Tchaikovsky's *Trepak* from the *Nutcracker.* All notes not marked should be played with the right hand fist. Those notes marked with a "K" are played by striking the tambourine against the knee in the aforementioned manner.

TWO HAND ARTICULATION

The last technique I want to mention is useful for playing repetitive passages that need to be clearly articulated. Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien* (ex. #8) is a good example of passages that are suited for the *Two Hand Articulation.* Before trying this excerpt try this exercise. Place the tambourine inverted on your knee (use a chair to elevate your knee). Make sure the tambourine does not extend beyond the end of your knee. Using the fingertips from both hands try playing the first two measures of this excerpt. You should be able to produce a nice soft, articulate sonority. Now, try playing the same measures at a forte dynamic. Not so good, is it? To accomodate increased dynamics move the tambourine so that half of it is sticking out beyond the end of you knee. You must support the instrument by pushing your forearms down on the back rim. Now play the same measures at forte. You should be able to produce a much bigger sound. Now, the trick is moving the tambourine back and forth on your leg so that you can get from soft to loud to soft again. Once again, use your forearms to push the tambourine forward and if you play all eighth notes with your right hand you can use the left hand to pull it back. Remember, the moving forward (getting louder) is gradual, only a little at a time. This will require practice and patience!

Two Hand Articulation (knee support)

Example #8 ***Capriccio***



While it is difficult to explain musical concepts and techniques via the written word I hope this attempt has not been in vain. By no means are these ideas proposed as unique solutions, they are merely concepts that work for me. I encourage you to absorb this information, process it and utilize that which works for you. Many of you will go on to discover alternate techniques which extend beyond the scope of this article, and I look forward to learning from you.

For the past fifteen years, Neil Grover has performed with the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops Orchestras. He is also presently Percussionist/Assistant Timpanist with the acclaimed Boston Ballet. Neil has recorded with the Boston Symphony, Boston Pops , Philip Glass Ensemble, Empire Brass, Music from Marlboro, and as soloist with the Greek Radio Orchestra. Most recently, he recorded a music video with the legendary rock group "Aerosmith" for MTV. As founder and president of Grover Pro Percussion, Inc., Neil Grover's innovative designs and manufacturing techniques have contributed immensely towards raising the standards of excellence in the percussion industry. ■

TRIANGLE – THE GOOD SOUND

– by Dr. Stuart Marrs –

What is the "good sound"? When lecturing on the highly underrated idiophone known as the triangle, I start with a survey of opinions regarding preferences of sound production on the instrument. First I produce a sound that is very pure in nature (fig. 1) – few tones sounding at the same time.

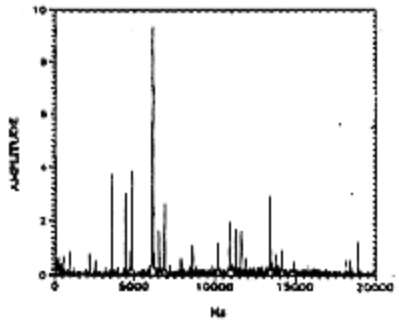


Figure 1 – *Graph shows fewer numbers of tones when triangle is struck at 90° to its plane when compared with fig. 2. Note the predominant spike at 6000 Hz.*

Then I play a sound that is thick and rich with many dissonant tones (fig. 2). Invariably, most listeners in the audience prefer the pure sound. This is understandable. In an isolated environment, why would someone prefer a dissonance to a consonance? The audience always reacts with bewilder-ment when I reveal that it is the second one, the one that is flush with harmonics, that is the accepted norm among professional players. It is preferred in part because the instrument is usually used in an ensemble context. As part of an ensemble, the humble triangle becomes integrally involved in an aspect of acoustics known as "summation of amplitudes." This means that the volume of pitches that are in phase (in tune) with other sounding frequencies add their volume on top of the others while the volume of the notes that are "out of tune" remains soft. If a triangle sound has few pitches, it has less chance of being "in tune" with the prevailing harmonic structure. A triangle sound more abundant in pitches will always cut through and sound as if it is in tune with the prevailing harmony. Imagine an instrument that automatically plays in tune! A triangle played with the "good sound" accompanying a series of harmonic changes sounds as if it is changing pitches with the chords.

HOW TO PRODUCE THE "GOOD SOUND"

For this issue, we are discussing two modes of vibration. The first, the one that produced the purer tone can be thought of as existing in a two dimen-sional plane. The legs of the triangle that form the open end vibrate back and forth, while the opposite side bows in the middle with the two closed corners being nodal points of no vibration (fig. 3). One creates this mode of vibration by striking the triangle at 90 degrees to its plane, on any of its sides. The second sound breaks out of the two dimensional mold into the third dimension. Here the open legs and closed side not only vibrate back and forth as in the first mode but also vibrate laterally, side to side (fig. 4). Scientifically, this is called "torque" or twisting. To make the triangle enter this twisting mode, we simply strike it at a 45 degree angle (or less) to its plane. This causes the instrument to torque and produce the lush desirable sound.

Now that you know how to produce the different sounds try a little experiment. Have a friend play a series of chord progressions on the piano while you play the triangle (the good sound) in the same rhythm. Listen to the triangle seemingly change its pitches to match the chords! The technique of striking the triangle at an acute angle to its plane extends to roll technique.

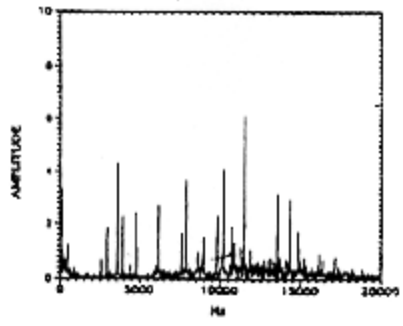


Figure 2 – *Graph shows increased number of tones when triangle is struck at 45° to its plane. Note that the amplitudes are more homogenous.*

Instead of rolling with the beater perpendicular to the corner of the triangle, try moving the wrist down and away from the corner while you are rolling (Fig. 5). Listen to the dramatic increase in fullness of sound. The beater is striking the triangle at an acute angle to its plane.

Whenever possible the triangle holder should be hand held. This is because energy (sound) is lost when the instrument is hung or clipped to a music stand. Again, a little experiment will show what I am describing. In a quiet environment, clip or hang your

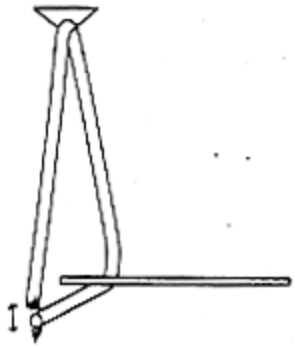


Figure 3 – *Struck at 90° to its plane, the triangle vibrates in a bi-directional mode, producing fewer partials.*

triangle to a stand and play it with a heavy beater. Touch the stand and feel the vibrations that should be emanating from the instrument passing through the stand. Now play it hand held. Can you hear the difference? The reason the energy doesn't dissipate

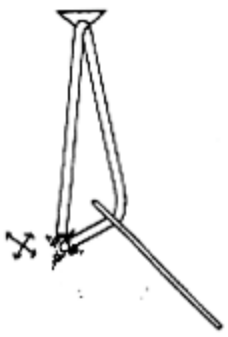


Figure 4 – *Struck at 45° to its plane, the triangle vibrates in a poly-directional mode, producing multiple partials.*

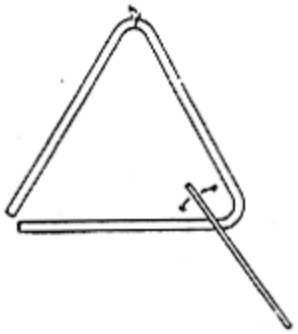


Figure 5 – *Move the wrist down and to the right from the normal rolling position to achieve the same multiple partials on the roll.*

through the hand as it did through the stand is that the fleshy fingers are poor conductors and allow most of the energy to be released in the form of audible sound waves caused by the vibrating triangle.

Although all triangles obey the same laws of physics, they are not created equal! The particular design and material of each model has a dramatic effect on the final result. The Grover Super-Overtone™ triangle has been designed expressly for a sound rich in partials. It maintains this positive characteristic throughout the dynamic spectrum. Sensitive pianissimos through sparkling fortissimos make this instrument the ideal triangle. Use of proper technique and a superb triangle, like the Grover Super-Overtone™ triangle will place the "good sound" in your hands. ❑

Dr. Stuart Marrs received his doctorate from the prestigious Indiana University School of Music. As a soloist, conductor, and teacher, Dr. Marrs' professional experience spans 20 years and three continents. His orchestral positions as principle timpanist and/or percussionist include the orchestras of Louisville, Bolivia, and Costa Rica. His freelance experiences include such diverse areas as TV, Ice Capades, symphonic orchestra and experimental groups. Dr. Marrs was director of the San José Chamber Players in Costa Rica, whose mission was to promote the diffusion of contemporary chamber music. Dr. Marrs is founder and president of the Maine chapter of the Percussive Arts Society, a driving force behind the development of percussion in the state of Maine. He has taught at the National University of Costa Rica, Indiana University, and is currently the percussion instructor at the University of Maine. Dr. Marrs has toured the U.S., Europe, and Latin America as a soloist, conductor, clinician, and teacher.

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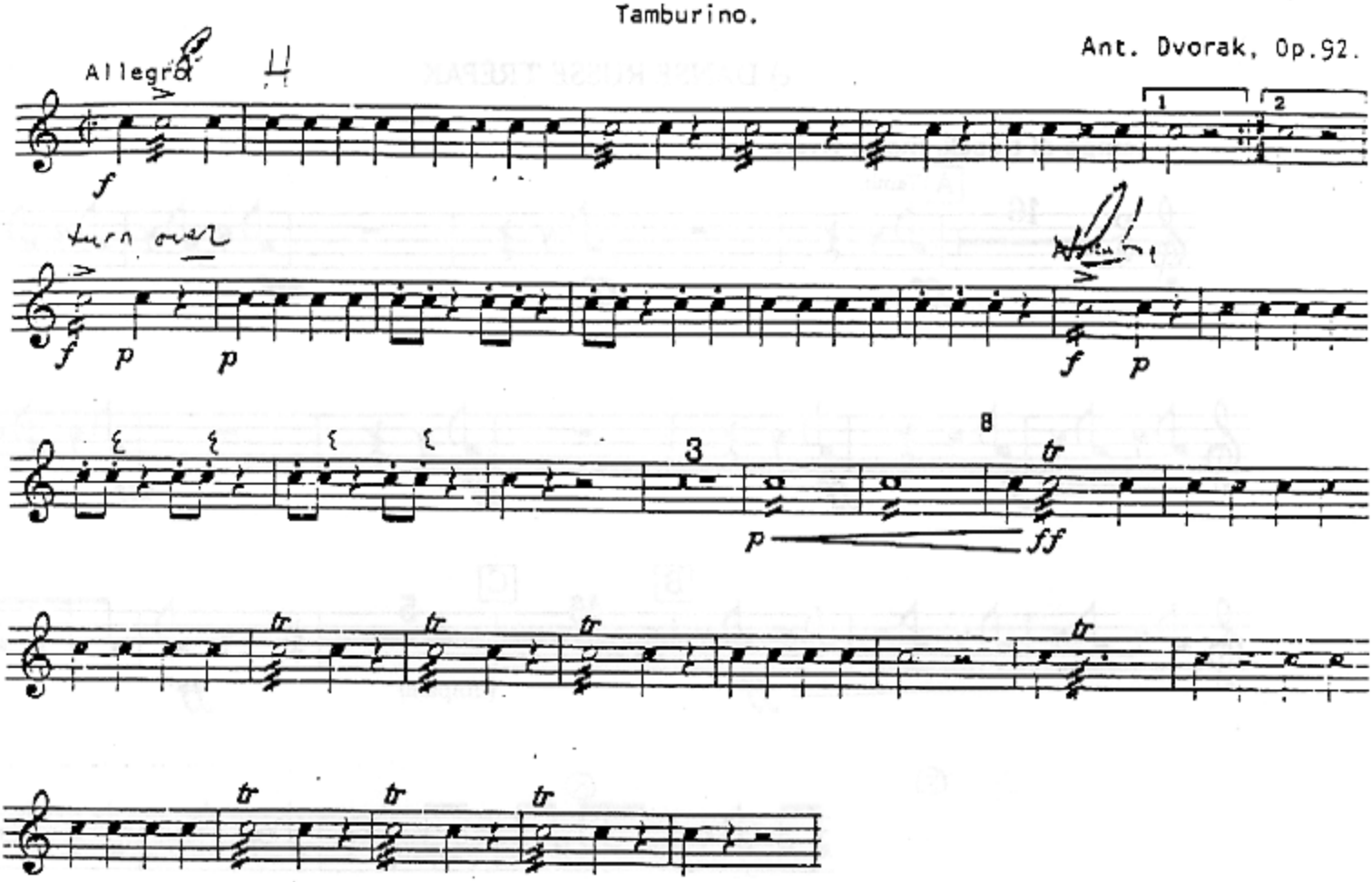
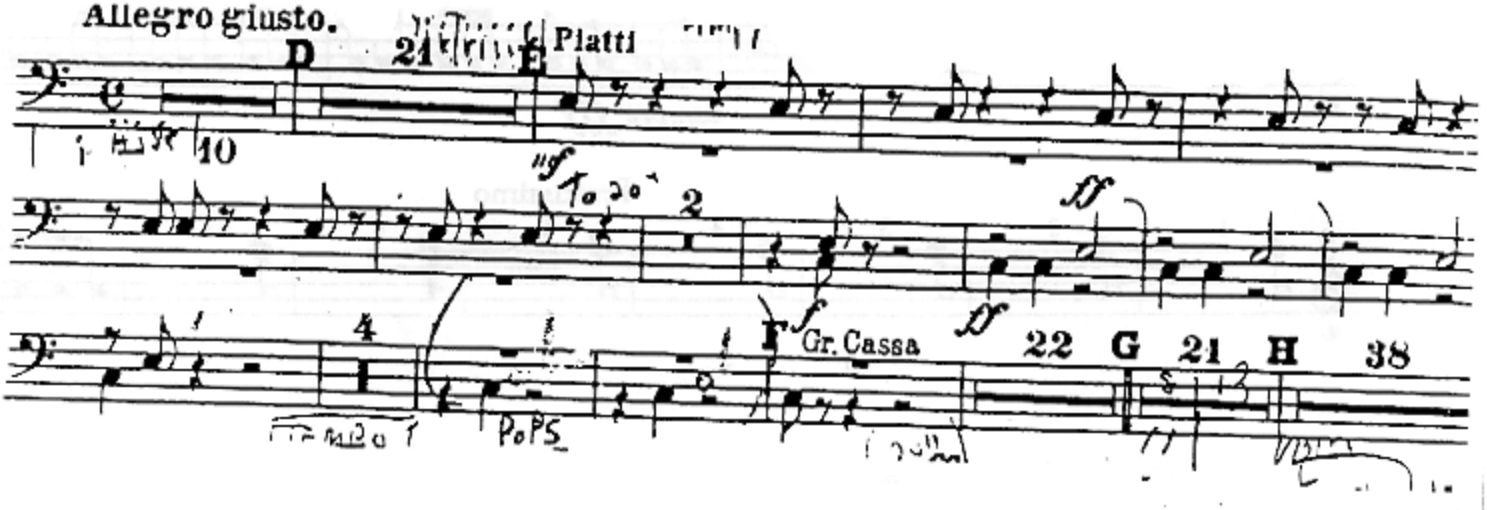
Tamburino.

Ant. Dvorak, Op.92.



ROMEO & JULIET



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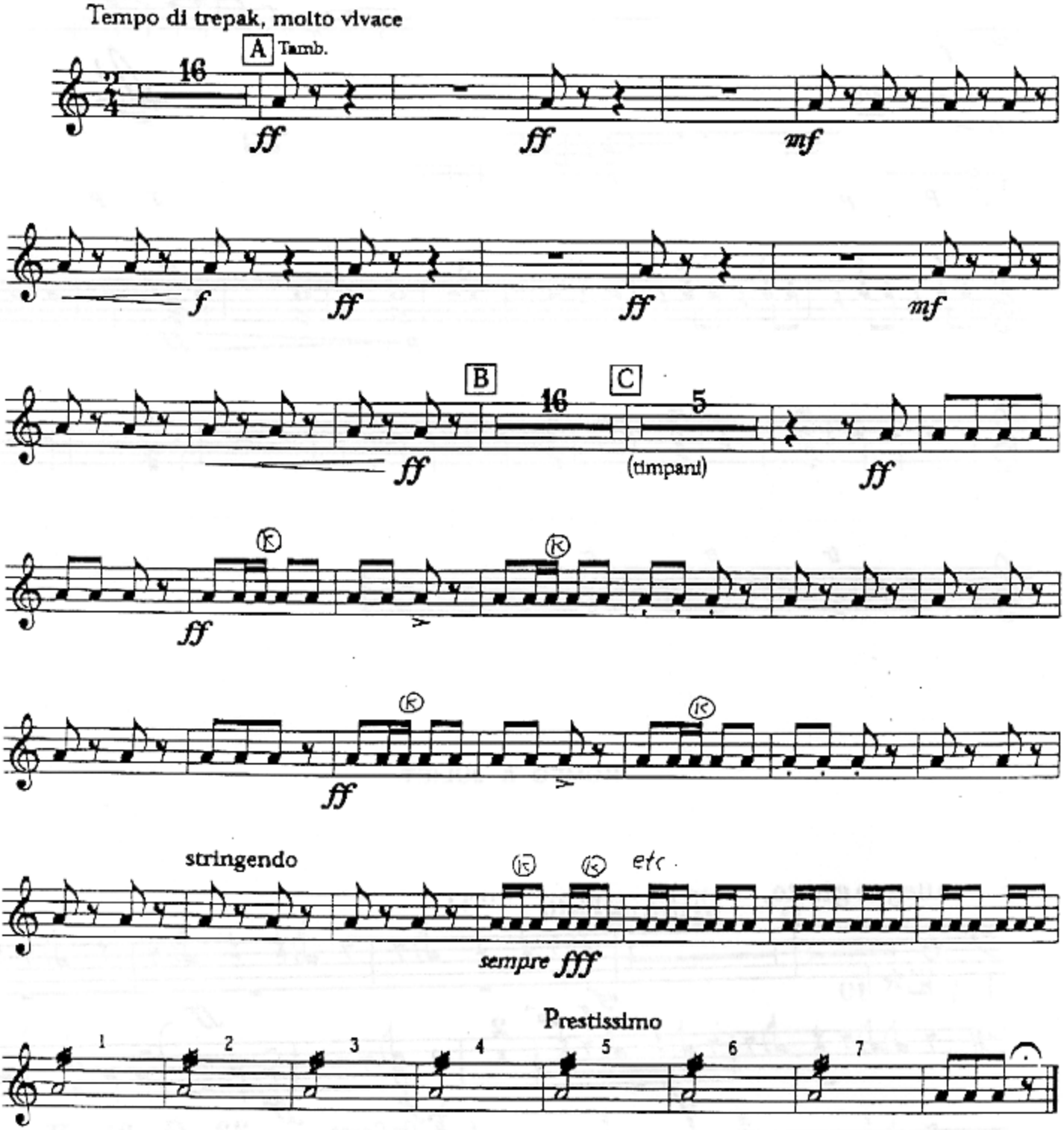

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Tambourine Essentials:
Basic concepts for superior performance

by Ben Stiers

Let's face it: the tambourine isn't the most glamorous instrument in the percussion family. In a typical educational setting, other "core" instruments such as snare drum, marimba, and timpani tend to dominate most students' practice time. As a result, many percussionists lack a basic understanding of sound production on the tambourine, and approach playing situations with poor technique. This is a shame, because developing a basic set of tambourine skills isn't very difficult at all! It's my hope that the information I've provided here will get you through most of the tambourine parts you'll encounter. AND, for the few situations you'll run into where something else is needed, the list of resources I've included will likely be able to help you out. If not, BE CREATIVE! Problem solving is part of the fun of being a percussionist!

PART 1: GET TO KNOW YOUR INSTRUMENT

Your basic concert tambourine has three basic parts: A head, a shell, and jingles.

- Every concert tambourine has a **head**. If the tambourine you were planning to use doesn't have a head, it's probably meant to be used as a hand-held rock/pop instrument or mounted on a drumset. Find one that has a head instead! Depending on your brand of tambourine, the head will be glued and/or tacked to the shell, so most tambourines can't be tuned easily. While plastic heads are becoming more common, most tambourines still come with calfskin heads. Calfskin sounds great, but is more fragile than plastic and much more vulnerable to weather changes. See the section on "Care and Maintenance" for more information on caring for calfskin heads.

- The **shell** is usually made of wood (though composite shells are becoming more popular) and is most commonly ten inches in diameter. It has two main features. First, you'll find **jingle slots** cut out all around the frame. Most general-purpose tambourines have two rows of jingle slots. Look closely, and you'll see that they come in two different sizes. This is will be important in our discussion of shake rolls. In addition to jingle slots, each shell features a **holding area**, which is the place where the jingles aren't. There is a hole in this area, but it's not there to help you hold the tambourine in any way. It's designed to allow you to mount the tambourine on a stand, should you need to do so.

- Finally, the **jingles** are what give the tambourine its characteristic sound. There are three basic metals used to make jingles: silver (high pitch), copper (medium pitch), and bronze (low pitch). In addition, some jingles are offered in combination, and there are options for "dry" tambourine sounds such as heat-treated jingles. Picking the right jingle sounds for your musical situation is an important consideration!

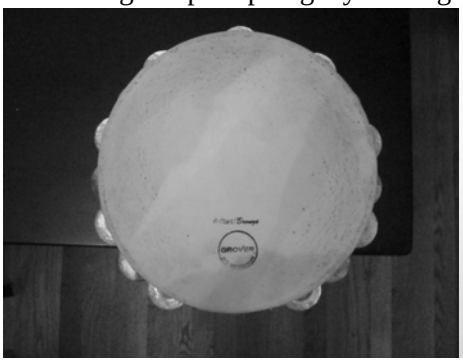
PART 2: MAKING GOOD SOUNDS

The tambourine is related to a lot of other jingle-bearing frame drums from around the world, such as the Brazilian pandeiro and the Egyptian riq. This global connection means that there are a lot of possibilities for sound production on the instrument. Even within the orchestral world there are a lot of different schools of technique! The methods I've outlined below are not the only way to play the tambourine, but I've found them to be the best way to start making good sounds quickly.

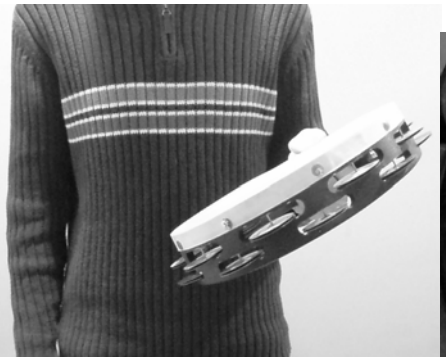
To get started, you'll need a trap table or other padded surface, a chair with a fairly low seat, and, of course, your tambourine!

Rest Position:

The tambourine is one of the toughest instruments to keep quiet when not in use. Therefore, a resting position that allows the tambourine to be picked up as quietly as possible is essential. Place the tambourine on a trap table or other padded surface so that the holding area hangs slightly over the edge. This will allow you to pick up the instrument without having to tip it up to get your fingers underneath.



Rest position



Ready position

Use of fingers to dampen head

Ready Position:

When preparing to play, just grasp and lift ***silently*** with your non-dominant hand with your thumb on top and fingers underneath. The tambourine should be at or just below chest level, so that your holding arm is in a comfortable position. Rotate the instrument in toward your body to a 45-degree angle. You can use your thumb on top and your middle and ring fingers underneath to dampen the head to various degrees.

Playing position:

Double-check to make sure that the tambourine is still at 45 degrees. If it's too vertical, the jingles will slide too much when you play and your articulations won't be clear. If it's too flat, the jingles will be free to hop after you play, resulting in the same problem. Now, move your dominant hand into position (For now, just hold it comfortably a few inches above the head. We'll get into the specifics of playing position as we go along).

Great! Now we're all ready to play! And guess what? There are only **SIX** basic techniques you need to know to get started!

Technique #1: Slow-Loud
This technique works well for fairly slow rhythms at *mf* and above.

- For moderately loud playing, bunch your middle three fingers together and play into the center of the head. Relax and let your hand fall into the head—let gravity do most of the work for you! (Try playing example #1 with this technique.)
- For louder volumes, form your hand into a loose fist and play with the flat of your knuckles, as if you were knocking on a door. Remember to stay relaxed! (Try playing example #1 with this technique, a little louder than before.)
- For really loud accents, you can use a flat, open hand. Just don't overplay—a little of this technique goes a long way! (Try playing example #2, using your fist for the unaccented notes and a flat palm for the accents.)

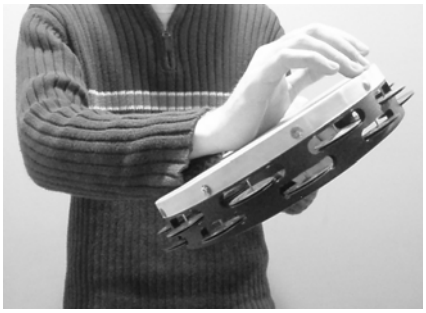

Bunched fingers (*mf-f*)


Fist (*f-ff*)


Flat hand (great for accents)

When playing with this technique in an ensemble, listen and make sure you're not playing too loud. Tambourines tend to cut through ensemble sounds very easily, so always remember to be sensitive!

Technique #2: Slow-Soft
Begin by *silently* placing the heel of your hand in the center of the head. This will eliminate more of the sound of the head, allowing the jingles to be heard more easily. Extend your fingers so that they rest comfortably on the edge of the head, right above the rim, at the highest point of the tambourine.


Slow-Soft playing position

To play, just tap the rim with your fingertips. For louder volumes, play with two or three fingers. For softer volumes, try just one finger. To get a full sound, even at soft dynamic levels, make sure to fall into the head, just like you did earlier. Don't just "flick" it! (Try playing example #1 with this technique, at dynamic levels from *pp* to *mp*.)

Technique #3: Fast-Loud

This technique is also referred to as "hand-knee" or "fist-knee" technique. To begin, put your dominant foot (the foot on the opposite side from your holding hand) up on a chair. Now, flip your tambourine upside down and position it so that the center of the head is about 3 to 6 inches above your knee (make sure to maintain a 45-degree angle, as in the photo below). Next, make a loose fist (as in technique #1) with your dominant hand above the center of the head.

Fast-Loud Playing Position (head down)

To play, alternate between striking the head with your fist (as in technique #1) and moving the tambourine down into your knee with your holding hand. When moving the tambourine, keep your wrist straight and move from the elbow. This will keep the tambourine at an angle, which will help to make the rhythm clear. It's a good idea to start slowly to get an idea of the sounds you're producing. Since we're all built a little differently, you may have to make some adjustments to your playing hand and the part of you knee you're striking to get an even sound between the two. (Try playing example #3 slowly with this in mind.) When executing rhythms, use your hand to play all of the downbeats and your knee for the upbeats, similar to right-hand lead on snare drum. (Try playing example #4 with this "sticking policy" in mind.)

While using this technique with the head facing down is an excellent way to get started, its primary drawback is that you can't flip the tambourine over in a performance without making extraneous noise. It is possible (though a little more difficult) to use fist-knee technique with the head facing up. Simply rotate your holding hand to the side of the tambourine, as in the photo below, and play as before, making sure to move the tambourine from the elbow, not the wrist. This technique will take a little more time to develop, but being able to move to and from the fist-knee position *silently* is well worth the effort.

Fast-Loud playing position (head up)

Technique #4: Fast-Soft
Our final method of executing rhythms on the tambourine uses concepts from both Technique #2 and Technique #3. To get started, place your dominant foot on the chair again. Rest the tambourine on your leg, angled inward at 45 degrees. The holding area of the tambourine should be at the lowest point. Use the heels of your hands to pin the instrument lightly in place, so that your fingertips rest comfortably on the rim. Make sure that your hands are positioned symmetrically for an even sound. As with Slow-Soft playing, you can vary your dynamics by adding or subtracting the number of fingers used by each hand. (Try playing example #5 with this technique, at dynamic levels from *pp* to *mp*.)


Fast-Soft playing position

Technique #5: Shake Rolls
The shake roll is the most commonly misplayed tambourine technique. Mistakes usually relate to the two following concepts:

- The purpose of a roll on a percussion instrument is to create a sustained **sound**, not a sustained **rhythm**.
- Tambourine rolls are usually notated with a clear beginning and a clear ending.

To follow the first concept, we need a shake roll that creates a smooth sound with as little "shooka-shooka" as possible. Luckily, tambourine makers have helped us out a lot with this. Remember the two different sizes of jingle slots mentioned earlier? These are designed to create overlapping rhythms in shake rolls, making the "shooka-shooka" sound less noticeable. Start by holding the tambourine vertically with the head facing toward you. From here, there are two motions we can use to create shake sounds. The first is a rotational motion that uses the forearm as its axis. The second is a back-and-forth motion from the elbow that is similar to the motion used when playing a shaker. When sped up, each of these motions can produce a convincing shake roll, but our best bet is going to be to combine them both. To practice finding that combination, begin with the rotational motion and slowly try to morph into the back-and-forth motion. In the middle of the process, there will be a "sweet spot" where you're doing a combination of the two. This will take some practice, but the result is a beautiful shake roll. Remember to stay relaxed—it's very easy to tense up with this technique.

In order to follow the second concept above, we need to make sure our rolls begin and end cleanly. The easiest way to do this is to begin and end each roll with an attack. Since our general playing position is a 45-degree angle, but our shake roll position is vertical, an easy way to think of this is to start the roll by "pushing" the tambourine into a vertical position (from the lowest point on the head) with our starting attack, and end the roll by "pushing" the tambourine back to a 45-degree angle (from the highest position on the head) to end it. As you do this, be sensitive to the balance between your attacks and your roll—don't accent the beginning or end of the roll unless you mean to! (Try playing example #6 with shake rolls.)

Technique #6: Finger/Thumb Rolls

Shake rolls are great for loud dynamics, but what about softer rolls? For these, we'll use a technique that involves skipping a thumb or finger around the perimeter of the head. In order to do this, it may be necessary to apply some sort of substance to the head to create more friction. **Beeswax** is a great choice because it works well and is readily available at most craft stores. Just rub a small amount around the outside of the head and you're good to go.

Finger rolls are a good place to start because they produce the most delicate sound. Begin with the tambourine at a 45-degree angle, with the middle finger of your dominant hand on the edge of the tambourine close to your holding hand. For some extra leverage, place your index finger on top of your middle finger. Now, rub your middle finger around the outside of the head, adjusting the pressure as you go until you've got a nice sustained sound going. When you've found the ideal pressure, try to repeat the results. Be patient! This will take some time to develop. Once you can produce a reliable finger roll, all that's left to do is create a clear end to the roll. For a soft release, simply drop your thumb into the head as you lift your finger away from it (see photo below). For an accented release, you can drop the heel of your hand down instead of your thumb. (Try playing example #7 with finger rolls at dynamics from *pp* to *mp*.)

Finger roll

Finger roll release (with thumb)

Finger rolls work well for very soft dynamics. For slightly louder rolls, you can repeat the above process using your thumb. The only major difference is that your rolls will end with an attack by the pad at the base of your thumb (see photo below). Thumb rolls are also great for crescendos! (Try playing example #8.)

Thumb roll

Thumb roll release (heel of hand)

There you have it! Those are the six basic techniques that will get you through most of the playing situations you'll encounter. There are, of course, many other techniques for the tambourine, but these are a combination of the most frequently used and easiest to learn. For more information on extended tambourine techniques, consult any of the materials in the "Other Resources" section.

PART 3: MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS
The techniques outlined above work very well for the playing examples we've been using, but in order to truly make music with the tambourine, you'll need to keep a couple of things in mind.

First, it will be necessary from time to time to switch between the above techniques very quickly. Practicing these transitions is just as important as practicing the techniques themselves. Once you can get good sounds playing through the above examples, try playing them back-to-back with different techniques in order to get a feel for these transitions.

Second, transitioning from technique to technique will create a difference in your sound. In order to maintain consistency in a passage of music, you may have to widen your dynamic and tempo spectrum. How fast can you play with slow-loud technique? How quietly can you play fast-loud technique? How loudly can you play a finger roll? By taking each of the above techniques and working through the widest possible variety of tempos and dynamics, you'll give yourself plenty of options in playing situations. And options are always a good thing!

PART 4: CARE AND MAINTENANCE
High-quality concert tambourines must be cared for properly. It's important to take precautions to make sure that they're always in good working order. Most care and maintenance issues are common sense, such as storing your tambourine in a protective case and not stacking heavy items on top of it. Here are some not-so-obvious tips for caring for your tambourine:

Head maintenance:
Natural skin heads are vulnerable to weather changes. A sudden increase in humidity may cause your head to go slack, which can cause an undesirable tone and an increased risk of breaking the head. Changing a tambourine head is a very involved undertaking that is best avoided if possible. To minimize the effects of humidity, you can place your tambourine on a heating pad set to low, head side up, just prior to playing. The increase in heat will help to tighten the head. Just make sure that the head is up on your tambourine, especially if you're using beeswax! Some percussionists even weatherproof their tambourine heads by coating them in shellac and baking them, but this is a complicated process and is not recommended unless you know what you're doing.

On the other side of the coin, natural skin tambourine heads that are exposed to extremely hot, dry weather for long periods of time can actually stretch until they snap. If you plan to take your tambourine to the desert, store it in its case with a ***slightly*** damp paper towel inside. Too much moisture will cause mold, but the right amount will keep your head safe.

Shell Maintenance:
It's a good idea to check from time to time for cracks in the shell. These cracks tend to form around and in between the jingle slots, allowing the pins to fall out. If you spot one, simply glue and clamp gently.

OTHER RESOURCES
Here are a few of my favorite resources for tambourine. Enjoy!

The Complete Percussionist (DVD)
The US Army Field Band
-This DVD is an excellent instructional resource. The tambourine section, presented by MSG Bill Elliott, is an excellent demonstration of basic and advanced tambourine techniques.

Techniques of Playing Bass Drum, Cymbals, and Accessories
Al Payson
-Payson's text is an excellent source of etudes and orchestral excerpts for tambourine. The techniques he outlines are different from the ones I have outlined above, and offer some interesting sound possibilities.

The Art of Percussion Playing
by Anthony J. Cirone, Neil Grover, and Garwood Whaley
-This book is an outstanding resource for all accessory percussion instruments. Its coverage of both basic and advanced techniques includes plenty of high-quality playing examples. I highly recommend it!

Also, try playing etudes from any snare drum method book on tambourine. In addition to working on the above techniques, it's a great way to sharpen your problem-solving skills!

Finally, remember that there are many different approaches to playing the tambourine. While I feel the method I've outlined here is an excellent one for most situations, there are many tips, tricks, and "specialized" techniques out there that can help with those difficult or awkward passages we often have to play. Ask your teachers and colleagues for advice—you may be surprised how many different solutions there are to the same problem!

Ben Stiers is the director of percussion studies at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Kentucky, as well as a Master's Degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a Bachelor's Degree from Illinois State University. His primary teachers have included James Campbell, Paul Deatherage, John Willmarth, Dean Gronemeier, Tim Jones, David Collier, and Tom Marko.

Ben has performed with the Peoria (IL) Symphony Orchestra, the Illinois Symphony Orchestra, the Las Vegas Philharmonic, and the Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra, and has done extensive freelance work in the Las Vegas area. As an educator, he has worked on the staff of both the concert and marching percussion tracks for the Music for All Summer Symposium, and has been a writer, arranger, and instructor for several high school marching programs in Illinois, Nevada, and Kentucky. From 2010-2011, he also served as the vice-president of the Kentucky chapter of the Percussive Arts Society.

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