



Music education topics of interest to stimulate motivate and inspire...

It is the mission of Conn-Selmer, Inc. to provide an educational center, ongoing reference source, and support network for the professional growth of music educators. Communication between music educators is vital for the expansion of new ideas and techniques. By providing resources and opportunities that enhance the classroom experience, we hope to provide music educators with more time to focus on performance, more positive outcomes for teachers and student, and overall growth in music education opportunities.

Balancing a Timpani Head by Al Payson

Music students learn more than music - they learn of life and self-worth. You are a valuable person in the lives of your students. "Don't under-estimate the importance of your work or the responsibility that your job demands; enjoy it"

Percussion students need to be grounded in some knowledge of basic music theory. This should include scale study, intervals and the ability to sing and match pitches. Knowledge of these fundamentals will serve them well not only in tuning the timpani to the correct ranges, but also in performing in tune when playing with the band or ensemble.

Ranges. In order for the pedals to work properly, the timpani must be tuned to the correct pitches: 32" D–A, 29" F–C, 26" B flat–F, 23" D–A. If the heads are adjusted properly, the pedals will also work properly. There should never be a need to change the adjustment of the main spring screw, above the pedal. Care must be taken to tune each tuning post to the same tension around the drum.

There are several aids that help with this. The most accurate way to accomplish this is to use an electronic tuner; it is also important to use the ear. Proper tuning will produce a tone that rings evenly, with an absence of "beats." When the heads are adjusted properly, the overtones will ring steadily and will not waver.

Selecting mallets. Students should have at least three pairs of mallets: soft for rolls and legato passages, medium or staccato for more general passages, and ultra staccato for quick rhythmic performance. Wood ball mallets are also available, but should be used only if specified in the music.

Hand position and grip. The grip employed for timpani will have a great effect on the tone produced. The mallet handle should be placed between the thumb and first finger of each hand, and the fingers should wrap freely around the mallet. A loose grip will produce a lighter, "warmer" tone, while holding the fingers more tightly will create a sound that is darker and will have more contact to the attack. This is helpful when greater articulation is needed.

Stroke motion. The type of stroke used must fit the musical style or tone desired. Full strokes are used on nearly 90 percent of the notes played on timpani (the mallet head starts eight to ten inches above the head, moves to the head, then returns to the starting position). If this motion is very rapid, it will produce a more articulate, ringing sound. If it is slower, the sound produced will be more legato. For more rhythmic articulation, try keeping the mallet handles more parallel to the drumhead, which will cause the mallet head to strike with a flatter surface.

All strokes should strike the head approximately three to four inches from the edge, or lip, of the bowl. Too near the rim will produce a thinner tone, and as the mallet moves toward the center of the head, less pitch and more "boom" will be heard.

Attention to the suggestions above should help your percussion students play with greater musical maturity.

Al Payson is a retired percussionist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a position he held for 40 years, and is an elected member of the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame. He has many instructional materials in publication, including Beginning Snare Drum Method.

