



IMPROVISATION: A Tool for Learning in the Concert Percussion World

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Improvisation can be defined as the outward expression of an internal desire. In other words, what one is thinking is now expressed spontaneously in the form of music. Improvisation can be integrated into the learning of music and can be a vehicle toward superior performance.

Learning a composition with all the written notes is many times a challenge. Improvising before or after learning the composition can establish a stronger connection to the instrument and in the multi-percussion area a connection with a unique and new group of instruments. Additionally, improvisation helps the performer establish a connection between what the composer wants and the interpretation of the performer. This process widens the perspective of the piece and helps the performer feel more comfortable with it. Improvising on an instrument or group of instruments before or after learning a composition helps the performer feel comfortable with the instruments. Both give more life to the music.

Several factors contribute to improvisation and one of the most important is the experience of the performer. If the experience is classical (orchestral), the improvisation will surely be symphonic in nature. If it is jazz, the improvisation will have a jazz character to it.

Understanding the potential of the instrument or instruments will also have a great deal to do with the success of the improvisation. We all know that each of our percussion instruments has a typical sound. These are the sounds we associate with each instrument, but with a bit of experimentation, more sounds can be created from snare drum, mallet percussion and timpani. These new sounds can be incorporated with the normal sounds and an interesting improvisation can be created.

Improvisation is part of the musician's life. To play only the written notes inhibits one's creativity. There are no mistakes in improvisation because what one desires to play is appropriate for the moment. It is the outward expression of the inner desire. It gives one a sense of freedom.

Jazz has always had improvisation as the core of its existence. Unfortunately, Classical music has not incorporated much improvisation and concert percussionists are often inhibited when asked to improvise. Improvisation is fun and is a valuable musical experience. It can be used to enjoy music and to better learn repertoire.

