

Concert Percussion Staging For Effective Individual and Ensemble Performance

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This handout was developed to provide the band director with an understanding of basic percussion set-ups for the concert band setting. Ensemble performance is greatly affected by where percussion instruments and players are located and/or positioned on stage. Correct staging is related to musical considerations including balance, clarity, and ensemble precision. In addition, students must develop the skill of setting up and moving efficiently in multiple instrument applications.

General Repertoire Categories:

March

- Typical instrumentation: snare drum, field drum, bass drum and crash cymbals.
- Instruments that have unison rhythms should be placed next to each other:
 - Bass drum should be positioned next to the crash cymbals
 - Snare drum and field drum should be next to each other.
- Other instrumental considerations:
 - Bass drum should have an open tone with little to no muffling. Muffling can be done by the performer, as needed.
 - Depending on the style/character of the march, cymbals could be of various smaller sizes (16-18") to accommodate repetitive playing.
- Example: *Semper Fidelis by John Philip Sousa*

The Keyboard Choir

- Works utilizing a large number of keyboard instruments such as glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, marimba, crotales, and chimes
- Careful placement of keyboard instruments is needed. If not placed thoughtfully, certain keyboard instruments may overpower the other instruments.
- Careful consideration is needed to determine which keyboard instruments, if any, should be the dominant voice and which should be the support.
- As with any percussion instrument, mallet selection controls a number of factors including articulation, volume, and general tone.
- Example: *Rocky Point Holiday by Ron Nelson*

Multi-Percussion Assignments/Set-ups

- Many composers indicate the number of players needed, while some only indicate instruments. In the case of the latter, careful score study is needed to determine how many players are needed.
- Navigating several instruments generally requires a more advanced student.
- A logical set-up is important: the performer should be able to move efficiently from instrument to instrument.

- Who should be next to whom?
- Mallet selection is important when dealing with multiple instruments. Some instruments require specific mallets, so more than one type of mallet may need to be held at any given moment.
- Example: *Symphony for Band Mvt. 1 by Vincent Persichetti*

Other Common Issues/Problems

- Where do you put keyboard instruments? Why?
- Suspended cymbals can be of various sizes. Choose the sound that best blends with the music.
- All non-pitched percussion instruments should support pitched sounds, unless it is a solo/isolated musical passage for percussion. However, percussion instruments must be allowed to achieve characteristic tone.
- Timpani placement: should the timpani be in the percussion section or on the other side of the band set-up? Why?
- Where do I place auxiliary instruments? More importantly, the correct playing positions for triangle, tambourine and woodblock are often overlooked.
- Example: *La Procession Du Rocio by Joaquin Turina*

We would like to thank the following companies for their support: Yamaha, Sabian, Evans, and Innovative Percussion.