

Extreme Band Makeover: Percussion Edition

For many directors, the percussion section can often be the most perplexing in the entire band. Keeping up with current trends and ensuring the right implementation is being used can often be overwhelming. We will present you with a few simple ideas to revitalize and rebuild your percussion section. Much like remodeling a house, if you are smart about it and look at all the angles, you can turn your outdated home into something you will be proud of.

“Planning Phase”

1. Examine the foundation of your percussion program.
 - a. Are the “bones” of the program sound or do we need to gut and start from scratch?
 - b. Who instructs or teaches the students daily? Fall/Winter
 - i. Classroom scheduling
 - ii. Private lessons
 - iii. Masterclasses
 - c. Inventory
 - i. How many instruments are available for students to use?
 - ii. Who provides the sticks and mallets for the students to use?
 - iii. Practice pads/ keyboards accessible at home?
 - d. Membership and recruiting
 - e. Contests and Events
2. Figure out your vision for your percussion section.
 - a. Model after a program you like.
 - b. Realistic expectations.
 - c. 3 year, 5 year, 10 year visions.
3. Budget
 - a. Need money, staff, instruments
 - i. School budget
 - ii. Booster
 - iii. Student-led initiatives
4. Time frame
 - a. How much time do you have? Professionally and personally.
 - b. Work life balance

“Demolition Phase”

Keep your time frame in mind!

1. Simple Motto: “Simple concepts executed well.”
 - a. Get rid of anything that isn’t necessary.
 - i. Choose three to five skill sets per instrument to work on.
 - ii. Simple warmups that you can add variations to.
 - iii. Benefits of method
 - a. Less time for comprehension
 - b. More reps
 - c. Anyone can learn.
 - d. Easy to add skill sets.
 1. Snare
 - i. Single Height Warmup
 - ii. Timing
 - iii. Two Height Warmup
 - iv. Rolls
 - v. Flams
 2. Mallet
 - i. Scales/Green patterns
 - ii. Timing patterns
 - iii. Double Stops
 - iv. Arpeggios
 - v. 4-mallet
 3. Timpani/Accessory (optional, but worth it)
 - i. Tuning
 - ii. Tone
 - iii. Timing

“Remodel Phase”

Five Pillars of Percussion in 21st Century

1. Marching Percussion
2. Orchestral/Concert Band Percussion
3. Solo and Ensemble
4. Drumset
5. World Percussion

Keep things simple and vertically aligned between concert and marching seasons.

Try to keep terms and playing motions the same as much as you can.

Build the individual and the group at the same time.

Weaker things bound together become stronger together.

Marching Percussion

Limit your warmups to a few basics. Everything you play needs to reflect what is required in the show. Incorporate show chunks into warm ups if possible.

Battery

1. Legato Stroke
2. Accent/Tap
3. Timing
4. Double Stroke/Diddle
5. Rolls
6. Flams (if needed)

*Single Handed exercises are a great way to strengthen and detail each hand.

Front Ensemble

1. Double Stop warmup
2. Scale/green warmup
3. Timing
4. 4 Mallet double-stop warmup (if needed)
5. 4 Mallet lateral motion warmup (if needed)
6. Floor Party or Front Ensemble Jam

1. Decide how and where you will warm up. Do the warm ups need to line up with the wind warmups? Do you need a "catch all" warm up?
2. Play different dynamics with your warmups. Especially soft dynamics! There are more taps in the show than accents. There are more low doubles/diddles than high ones.
3. Make a rehearsal plan and timeline. Make sure the percussion stays ahead of the band.
 1. Try to stay one week ahead of the band musically. This will help the band tremendously.
4. Go slow. Ensure that every stroke type/height in the show music is learned correctly. Oftentimes students on quads learn wrong stroke types/heights because they are so focused on what drum to play. This will also help dramatically once you begin learning drill.
5. Use a metronome. Once you get things up to speed switch the metronome to halftime.
6. Marktime. Make sure the students can successfully marktime to the music before they attempt to march to the music.

Auditions

1. Use the audition process as a chance to build individual musicianship and technique.
 - a. Parent meeting
 - b. Audition workshops
 - c. Individual or group auditions?
 - d. Create etudes and/or exercises for your students.
 - e. Incorporate show music? Show skill sets?
 - f. Incorporate skill sets that you might not have time for during the marching season but are important concepts for students to know. Or they could be skill sets that you want to eventually incorporate into your marching shows.

Concert Percussion

1. Use rhythmic variations and octaves for Remingtons or band fundamentals.
 - a. 8th notes
 - b. Triplets
 - c. Double stops
 - i. Octaves and different intervals
 - d. Snare Drum on a harder pad or snares off with a towel muffling drum.
 - i. Stick Control
 - ii. Rolls
 - iii. flams
2. If possible, let the kids warm up on the pad for snare warmups.
3. Rotate kids around to play different instruments during the concert.
 - a. Assign your most challenging piece first. Put better players on more intricate parts.
 - b. Make sure all kids play a mallet part during the concert if possible, and accessory instruments.
 - c. Keep a spreadsheet with all of the percussion kids and what they are playing. This will help to ensure everyone gets a chance to play every instrument.
4. Have a logistic rehearsal in which you discuss setup or mallet choices/ expectations with your percussionists early in the year. They must know you are paying attention to them.
 - a. Timpani should be near the tubas/ low brass.
 - i. Use mallet changes for articulation and not volume.
 - a. Tone
 - b. Tuning
 - c. Clarity
 - b. Bass Drums and Crash cymbals should be next to each other during marches.
 - i. Concert Cymbals vs. Marching Cymbals
 - ii. Concert Bass Drum Mallets
 - a. General Mallet
 - b. Rollers
 - c. Staccato Mallet
 - c. Concert Snare
 - i. Wood vs. Metal
 - ii. Wet or Dry
 - iii. Thinner sticks vs. general vs marching
 - d. Accessories
 - i. The tone is important.
 - a. Professional models vs. Toys models
 - ii. Suspended Cymbal sizes
 - a. 20" Good general size
 - b. 18" Thinner sound
 - c. 16" Tiny used for lighter pieces
 - d. 24" Grainger Cymbal
 - iii. Triangles
 - a. Overtones
 - b. Angle of striking
 - c. Rolls

- iv. Tambourine
 - a. Double Row vs. Single Row
 - b. Cheap vs. Professional
 - 1. Stage and recording considerations
 - c. Rolls
1. Use percussion ensembles as a supplement to the concert band or orchestra literature. If they are working on it by themselves, choose a repertoire they can easily understand. Make sure you make assignments or pass-offs in which they have to play for you.
 2. Help them realize that percussion is a color instrument. Please pay attention to what they sound like.
 - a. Youtube Recordings of professionals
 - b. Self Recordings
 3. Use Allstate/ Region auditions to develop students.
 - a. Great way to teach musicianship.
 - b. Improve technical skills.
 - c. Learning to perform for people.
 - d. Helps to ensure students don't go years without playing an instrument.
 - e. Chance to let your gifted students shine.

Solo Literature and Percussion Ensemble Literature

1. Teach musicality and musicianship first with the selection. Build technique with the warmups.
2. Make sure they can read it if they are working alone.
3. Use youtube! There is so much percussion content out there. Good and Bad.
4. If possible, have students learn two solos each year (one drum based and one keyboard based)
5. Use percussion music resource guidelines to help choose repertoire- Texas PML
6. Keep a spreadsheet to track what solos each student plays.
7. What skill sets would you like the student/students to be working on?
8. What skill sets would you like to showcase?
9. What is the solo or ensemble going to be performed at/used
10. Solo Instrumentation Considerations
 - a. Mallet
 - i. Access to equipment.
 - ii. Students' reading ability level.
 - iii. Length of solo
 - iv. Repetition in solo
 - b. Snare
 - i. Rudimental vs Concert
 - ii. Some techniques/Strength can take longer to develop.
 - iii. Tempo
 - iv. Quad solos? Can be good for some and bad for others.
 - c. Timpani
 - i. Tone
 - ii. Melodic
 - iii. Easier to read

iv. Hard to find space to practice

d. Multi-Percussion

- i. Some very excellent and unexplored works
- ii. Instrumentation can be frustrating.
- iii. Can you leave it setup?

Build the inventory

1. Buy quality instruments.
2. Work on building your solo and ensemble libraries. Stay current/fresh.
3. Buy used instruments from Drum Corps
4. Shop around and ask the opinion of teachers.
5. Have a 5-year instrumental plan.

“The Reveal”

1. Create performance opportunities
 - a. Percussion Concert
 - b. Regular Band Concert features
 - c. Recitals
 - d. Competitions
 - i. Fall Drumline
 - ii. WGI
 - e. Recordings
 - f. Festivals and Conferences

Don't forget to tune your drums!

Drums heads have a pitch naturally. Tune them or have someone tune them periodically. Below are a few tuning options. Of course there are many preferences on tuning and the ensemble/style of music can dictate tuning as well. The most important thing is that the drums are “in tune” with themselves (all lugs are matched). From there let your ear guide you.

Concert Snare

Batter head Ab-Bb

Snare side head (Tune anywhere from a major third to a 5th above batter)

The resonance changes as you open up the drum.

Tune the snares. (Watch youtube video)

Timpani

Tune to these notes on the lowest note of the timpani.

32" C-D

29" F

26" A

23" C

Concert Bass Drums

- Tuning options on batter head
 - Size dependent (C-Eb)
- Tuning options on resonant head
 - Same pitch as batter
 - M2 above
 - M3/m3 above

Marching Snare

- Batter Head
 - A or Bb
 - Feel

- Snare Side
 - D or C#

- Marching Tenor
 - Low to High: BDEG

Marching Bass

- Bottom to Top- D, A, D, F#, A

Feel free to contact us with any questions. Thank you and have a great convention.

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