

Teaching Percussion

ideas on the basic essentials for the non-percussionist band director to teach beginning snare drum

- I. Basic Considerations
 - A. Heterogeneous or homogenous classes?
 - B. How long are class periods? Do you have band every day?
 - C. As we know, it is the Percussion section and not the Drum Section. That being said, consider the following:
 1. The snare drum is considered to be one of the basic instruments of the percussion family, and so much derives from playing it.
 2. Playing other percussion instruments can be built off of things learned for snare drum.
 - D. Plan your year to get basics in. You can only get so much taught. While wind instrument students are playing one instrument, you are playing at least two (snare and keyboard).
- II. Holding the Snare Stick
 - A. Define the fulcrum. Balance point of the stick.
 - B. Position of hands
 1. Thumbprint and first joint of both the index finger and the middle finger, across from each other. Thumb points toward the bead of the stick, index and middle fingers points down. A gentle holding, not a strong squeeze.
 2. Flat backs of hands.
 3. Sticks at approximately a 90-degree angle to each other. You can help the student with this with tape on a drum pad, or lines drawn on a batter head.
 4. "Cocoon" about half-way closed.
- III. Four Different Types of Snare Stroke—generally, high=loud, low=soft
 - A. The Legato (or "long") Stroke: Stick starts and ends at the same height, allowing the stick to rebound. Useful for playing loud passages of music. This has other names, such as down-up stroke and full stroke.
 - B. The Up-Stroke: Stick starts low and ends high, using a whipping motion. Used on soft notes, preparing to do Legato Strokes.
 - C. The Down-Stroke: Stick starts high and is stopped low. Stop the stick after striking so the tip remains 1-2 inches from the drum head. Essential for playing musical passages that have sudden dynamic changes from loud to soft.
 - D. The Tap: Stick starts low and ends low. Very small strokes to play repeating soft notes. You might think of them as tiny full strokes.
- IV. Let's Talk (Snare) Drum Buzz (Multiple Bounce or Concert) Roll
 - A. Stage 1
 1. Lift up bead of the stick with the other hand and simply let it fall to the drum head, and rebound on its own until it stops on its own. Then switch hands.
 2. Then lift the stick up with your wrist, pause, and let gravity take over. Do this with alternating hands, as well.
 - B. Stage 2

1. Same as the second step of Stage 1, except let the sticks' bounces overlap with each other.
2. Before one stick finishes bouncing, follow the same procedure with the other hand.
3. In other words, every second or so, the two sticks will both be bouncing.

C. Stage 3

1. The speed-up process.
2. To get this slow-motion roll to sound like an actual roll as we think about it, we need to get the bounces closer together.
3. The S-P-OO-L Method. SPOOL.
 - a. When first speeding the roll up, the student must be sure that their middle finger is in contact with the underneath side of the stick.
 - b. "S" stands for "SQUEEZE". The student "squeezes" SLIGHTLY with their middle finger on the underneath side of the stick.
 - c. "P" stands for "PINCH". The student's (index finger and thumb) pinch the stick SLIGHTLY. Similarly, the middle finger is also slightly pinching.
 - d. "OO" stands for "OOMPH". This means the student becomes a SLIGHT bit more energetic (the notes delivered with a little bit of "oomph") with the movement of their wrists/sticks toward the drum head.
 - e. "L" stands for "LOWER". As the student progresses through these steps, the bounces—hopefully—become a little bit closer together, thus creating a buzzy sound. To gradually get faster and buzzyer, the sticks must stop having quite as high of a stick height as in the earlier steps. In other words, keep the sticks "lower".

D. As the roll progresses, the idea is to keep as relaxed of a sound as possible.

1. The student needs to not be anxious to play fast, but to play smoothly.
2. Let the beads of the sticks "float" on the top of the head. No downward pressure--like a lily pad on the surface of a lake.

E. Once the student can do this, approach them with primary strokes.

1. Begin with four 16th-notes and a quarter note, played alternately. 1-ta-te-ta-2.
2. After this, begin the process of having them play with the same primary stroke skeleton, and simply allow the sticks to buzz, except for the last note.
3. The teacher can play single strokes followed by the students, and then the teacher can do the same with buzzed, also followed by the students. "I play, you play".
4. After a while, have the students start with that same skeleton, but don't stop on count 2. Go

F. Make certain that the back fingers are in contact with the stick. Fingers should not come off the stick.

G. If possible, this should be a daily check item, even if it just means going down the line and hearing each student do a 3-second roll.

H. Stress to students that everything should still be moderately relaxed.

I. I tell students that they can't be considered good at snare drumming if they can't do a fairly good drum roll. This is a priority.

V. Let's Talk Double-Stroke (Rudimental) Roll

A. Go back to Stage 1 of the buzz roll.

1. Have the student lift up the stick with the other hand, let it drop, and then simply stop the stick after two notes. If they ask, I tell them we stop it with our back fingers, or by letting the stick hit the heel of my hand. I try to not overanalyze this.

2. I then have them lift up the sticks with the stick hand and do the same.
 3. I impress upon them that any thing beyond two notes is no longer a double-stroke roll.
 4. Have the students do this multiple times with each hand (not alternating). Again, the way to get the two notes closer together is the "SPOOL" method.
- B. Use the primary stroke procedure that we used in the buzz roll.
 - C. I have found that the quicker the primary stroke rhythm, the more success students have in not letting double strokes evolve into buzzes.
 - D. Encourage the students to allow their sticks to bounce a little higher as they are learning this. I find that this also helps alleviate unwanted buzzes.
 - E. As with the buzz roll, it's good, if possible, to check this every day.
- VI. Let's Talk Flams
- A. With the wrists mostly, raise one stick higher than the other, and let them come down simultaneously.
 - B. Follow through, so that the student is in position to do a flam with the other hand.
 - C. The name of the flam is the hand represented by the note (and not the grace note).
 - D. Students need to be able to do this, both with alternating, and not alternating.
 - E. Reverse flams.
- VII. Let's Talk Drags
- A. Different name for a ruff.
 - B. Procedure resembles the flam process. Simply let the grace note hand strike/bounce twice.
 - C. Impress to the students that it is a "wide flam".
 - D. Drags can either be double-stroke or buzz. How do you know when to use which one?
- VIII. Summary
- A. I would always find myself frustrated that I couldn't get everything taught in a year on both snare and keyboards that I wanted to. Give yourself some grace and realize that you only have a certain amount of time in the day or week to teach these two different instruments.
 - B. The goal in snare drum playing is a relaxed style of playing, with good coordination between hands, brain, and eyes, and to know that it is a unique opportunity for students to learn more than one instrument.