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## Section

# 1

## THE BEGINNING PERCUSSION PROGRAM

One of the unanswered questions by music educators may be "how did we begin so many drummers and develop so few musicians?" Thousands of youngsters begin on the percussion instruments each year, only to drop the study of the instruments after a short time. Many more choose not to participate in organized instrumental music programs but learn on their own, performing in various groups and combos apart from the school ensemble.

There may be as many different methods of developing a beginning percussion programs as there are programs themselves. When teaching percussion instruments in a music program, there are many factors to keep in mind:

- At what grade level is the student beginning percussion instruction?
- Does the instrumental program require previous musical experience?
- How does the school system view music education?

### GOALS FOR THE PERCUSSION PROGRAM

The percussion instructor, in conjunction with other teachers, administrators and parents, must set the goals and the expectations of the percussion program. Before making drastic changes and demands in any aspect of the music program, be sensitive to issues such as tradition and the economic climate of your community.

### METHODS OF PERCUSSION INSTRUCTION

**Percussion Class** - The most effective method of instruction for the young percussionist is the heterogeneous instrument class. Many school systems begin instruments (other than percussion) in a combination of like-instrument and ensemble experiences in the first year, adding percussionists the next year, after they have received a full year of percussion class instruction. In an effort to produce tone production, intonation and balance in the brass, woodwind and/or string sections, young percussion students are often left out of much of the activity of a beginning ensemble.

**Private Lessons** - Private instruction should be encouraged for all instruments. A positive experience with a private instructor will enhance the students' knowledge and make them more valuable to the ensemble.

**Percussion Consultants** - Music retailers, professional percussionists, college percussion students and even advanced high school percussionists can supplement the instruction of the percussion class. Many teachers do not take advantage of these valuable resources. Many universities can arrange a "special project" for a percussion major who is willing to help, using the experiences for credit or required observation hours in music education courses.

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

**Prior Musical Knowledge** - A student with musical experiences such as music class, piano lessons or growing up in a "musical" family may have an advantage over others, but this alone does not guarantee success on any instrument. The passion for music and the willingness to study a musical instrument should be the main criteria for participation in any music program.

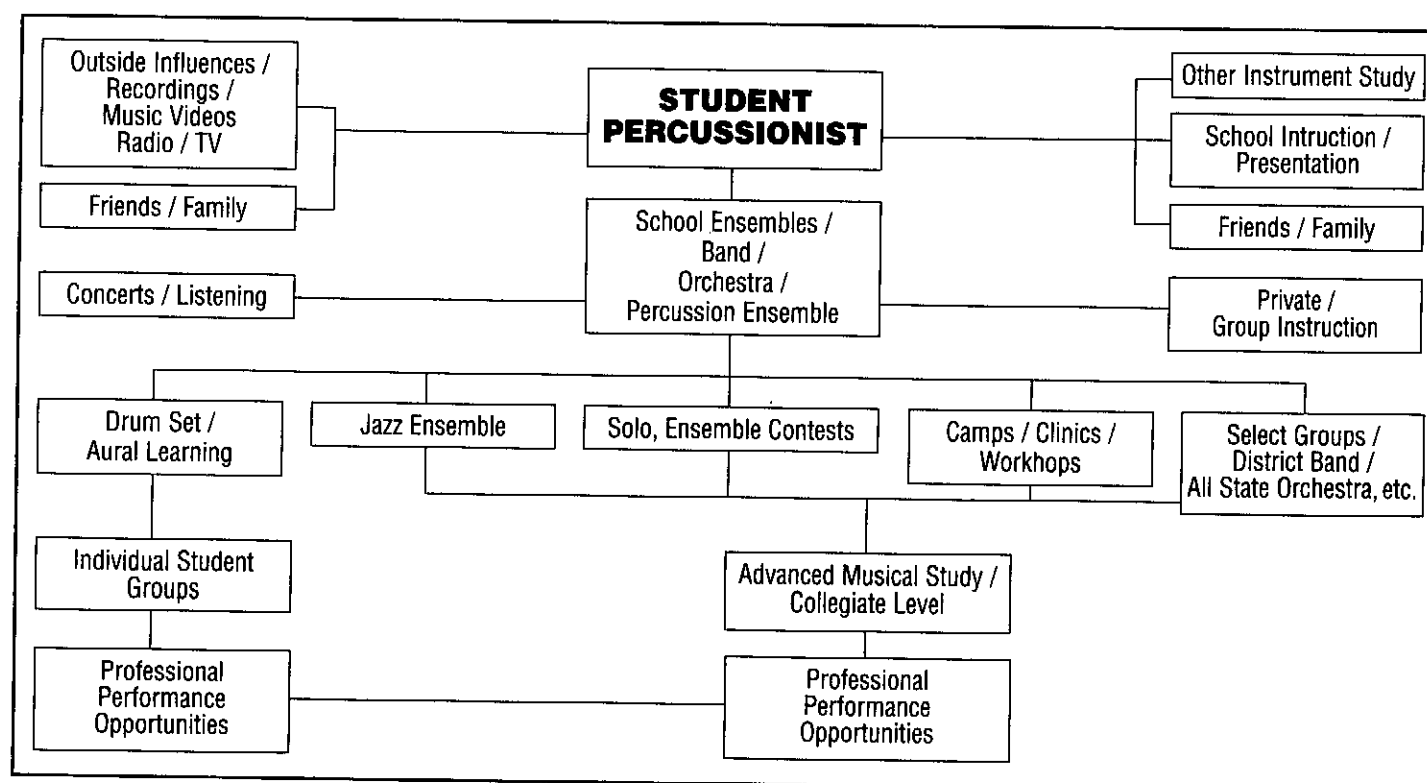
**Aptitude:** The following methods have been adopted in some programs to help create interest in the percussion family and to help determine aptitude for percussion study.

- Verbalizing various rhythms and having the student repeat them.
- Repeating the process above by clapping or hitting sticks on a surface, observing how "natural" the student looks during this process.
- Asking the student to clap or tap their foot to the pulse of a musical selection.
- Displaying as many percussion instruments as possible and giving the student the opportunity to play the instruments.

**Doubling/Instrument Substitution** – Doubling or substituting instruments may serve as an opportunity to keep students occupied and to help them learn new techniques. Doubling snare drum parts on practice pads, hand drums or tambourines, adding hand cymbals in unison with bass drum parts, or playing flute or oboe parts on a xylophone or bells provides a musical outlet for players who might otherwise be sitting idle. Also, with the addition of hand drums and other world percussion instruments in today's classroom, there may be opportunities for students to develop technique on non-traditional instrument through doubling and substitution.

**Sticks/Mallets Policy** - The student should be expected to supply his own sticks and/or mallets for the snare drum or mallet percussion instruments. As the student becomes more advanced, the instructor may require the purchase of a variety of sticks, mallets and accessory percussion instruments. Be aware of the financial ability of the community to support these demands. Keep in mind that mallets and accessory percussion instruments have little or no resale value when compared to that of an instrument. Provide the student and parent with a list of sticks, mallets, etc. required for each grade level.

This chart represents many of the influences that today's drummer/percussionist will experience. The young player will profit from all musical settings, both in school and outside of school.



### SECTION ONE NOTES:

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# Section 2

## THE FAMILY OF PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

The percussion section represents the only part of the traditional band or orchestra that is still experiencing significant evolution. We continue to observe instruments on that we have never seen, heard, or even classified as an instrument (brake drums, garbage can lids, metal pipes, etc.). Furthermore, as composers and arrangers continue to incorporate these items into their scores, the instructor needs to be prepared to accept them as a part of the percussion family and to understand their application.

While most musicians continue to consider percussion instruments as *pitched* (xylophone, timpani) or *non-pitched* (snare drum, hand drums, cymbals), the percussionist and composer are constantly challenging that assumption by altering traditional sounds and the manner in which the instruments are played.

The percussion instruments have traditionally been categorized in four types: membranophones, idiophones, aerophones and chordophones. A fifth category, electronic percussion instruments, is a recent addition.

**MEMBRANOPHONES** - Instruments where a membrane, either made of skin or a plastic/synthetic material, is stretched over a bowl or a shell. Membranophones include instruments with no shell, such as a Roto-Tom; a drum with an open end, like a conga, timbale or concert tom-tom; a closed-shell drum, such as the snare or bass drum, where the "reflective" head sympathetically vibrates with the head which was struck; and tuned drums, such as timpani, where a pitch can be clearly defined. Many instruments on the marching field (bass drums, tom-toms) and in concert music (concert toms, bongos) are tuned to specific pitches, but are difficult to perceive as tuned instruments due to their timbre.

**IDIOPHONES** - Instruments which vibrate in their entirety to produce the sound. An accessory percussion instrument which is struck, shaken, scraped, bowed or turned is usually considered an instrument of indefinite pitch. Tuned idiophones include the keyboard percussion instruments as well as tuned gongs, etc. However, more compositions are appearing that require instruments such as claves, wood blocks, temple blocks and lead pipes to be tuned to specific pitches.

**AREOPHONES** - Instruments where the sound is produced by a vibrating air column. The production of sound is generally produced by blowing, but some instruments produce their sound while being tossed or spun in the air.

**CHORDOPHONES** - Instruments where the sound is produced through a vibrating string. The string is struck with an implement or through mechanical means, and is enhanced by a resonating box or soundboard, as found in a piano.

**ELECTRONIC PERCUSSION** - Instruments where the sound is produced through electronics. Electronic percussion is generally defined as a family of instruments that are the upstart of the synthesizer, such as the drum machine or percussion controller. The percussion controller can "trigger" another MIDI instrument such as a keyboard synthesizer or other MIDI device.

### FUNDAMENTALS OF STROKE, ARTICULATION AND TONE

The goal when striking a percussion instrument is to put the instrument into vibration by striking it with a stick, mallet or by hand. The sound which results is determined by the following criteria:

- 1.) Instrument Played/Surface Tension/Composition
- 2.) Grip/Hand Position
- 3.) Level, Velocity and Intensity of Stroke
- 4.) Articulation/Sticking/Implement Placement