

Timpani Tips and Tricks for the Young Percussionist

By: Airman First Class Kathryn Yuill

USAF Band of Mid America

The First Steps

1. Standing vs. Sitting
 - a. Sitting: easier to make quick tuning changes, not arching back too much
 - b. Standing: easier for pieces that require a lot of moving around
2. Playing Position/Beating Spots
 - a. Only play in the middle when it is specifically written in the piece
3. Drum Set Up
 - a. Tendency to pull the drums in too close
 - b. Stand equal distance from each drum, put mallets in playing position, and rotate your torso over all of the drums to determine how far away they need to be
 - c. Position within the band
 - i. Try to keep the timpani near the low brass, since the music is usually similar
4. Configuration
 - a. 32"-29"-26"-23"

The Fundamentals

Grips

1. French
 - a. Hands are turned slightly outward, thumbs are on top of the stick
2. German
 - a. Similar to how you hold a snare drum stick
3. American
 - a. Combination of French and German
4. Different reasons to use certain grips
 - a. French: General playing, some rolls
 - b. German: 16th notes, syncopated rhythms
 - c. American: Rolls, especially loud in volume

Strokes

1. Normal
 - a. "The Lift"
2. Legato
3. Soft
4. Staccatto

Rolls

1. Single stroke rolls! (unless otherwise noted in the music)
2. "Attack at the front"
 - a. Put more emphasis on the front of the roll
3. Volume of roll determines speed
 - a. Louder = Faster, Softer = Slower

Tuning

1. Tools
 - a. Tuning fork vs. pitch pipe
 - b. Tuner (phone, electronic tuner, etc.)
 - c. Tuning gauges
 - d. Intervals/Ear Training
2. How to make life easier
 - a. Hum the note into the drum
 - i. For when you have to retune during a piece
 - b. Playing songs on the drum for intervals
 - i. Minor Third – “Rite of Spring”
 - ii. Perfect Fourth – “Here Comes The Bride”
 - iii. Perfect Fifth – “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”
 - iv. Major Sixth – “My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean”
3. Listen to the band

The Next Steps

Mallet Selections

1. Choose different mallets for certain articulations or the way they feel in your hands
 - a. Soft vs. Hard mallets

“Special” Techniques

1. Cross-sticking
 - a. Try not to double stick on timpani if possible, cross sticking is a good alternative



2. Muffling
 - a. With hands
 - b. Felt mufflers
3. Extended Techniques

Book Recommendations

Saul Goodman – “Modern Method For Tympani”

Ronald Horner – “The Tuneful Timpanist”

John Tafoya – “Working Timpanists Survival Guide”

Solos

Elliott Carter – “Eight Pieces for Four Timpani”

John Beck – “Sonata for Timpani”

Saul Goodman – “Ballad for the Dance”

Jacques Delecluse – “20 Studies for Timpani”