

BLUE CADETS

2024 Front Ensemble Packet

Percussion Arranger: Nathan Picard
nathanpicard@nathanpicardmusic.studio

Front Ensemble Approach

The approach we will be taking here at the Blue Cadets heavily emphasizes musicality. We are looking to achieve a sound that will give us the most possibilities with phrasing and dynamics, while also having the most ergonomic output to create our sound. In other words, we want to sound great while feeling great in our hands, too.

- **Presence**

- A confident presence is inherent in everything we do. We stand up with good posture, activated core, full chest, and relaxed arms. Our chins will be up, full of confidence.
- We will (mostly) pulse starting four counts before we play to prepare us for performing. Our pulse should be legato with an emphasis on the downbeats (think head-banging as an extreme example). Imagine that the audience is always there, watching. We will adapt our pulse to fit the style of music, but this is the general guideline.
- We will maintain a strong second position with our feet slightly more than shoulder-width apart. We can adapt it so that one foot is in front of the other, but **the feet must not be together**. We will shift our body to be directly behind the center of our hands, leaning with small changes in position and taking steps with large changes in position. Awareness of your contribution to the whole is imperative. This extremely high level of awareness is the only way to create a cohesive ensemble approach. **Everyone** should be always giving 100% effort, 100% of the time.

- **Velocity**

- Velocity - the direction and speed we throw the implement at the playing surface.
- The direction of the stroke should always be perpendicular to the head. Any other angle, called "chopping," will result in reduced sound quality.
- The speed of the stroke will remain largely consistent, with slightly more velocity at high heights and slightly less at low heights. **Energy from the wrist will remain the same at all heights.** Gravity will take care of the rest.

- **Tension**

- Tension / Pressure - the amount of "squeezing" of the body
- We want soft and relaxed, yet heavy, hands.
- Technically, tension is required to hold a stick. However, think of **contact, not pressure**. The friction between your hand and the stick should do 95% of the work for you. It is very rare to see players use too little tension, so focus on reducing tension to approach that nearly imperceptible 5%.
 - One way of observing good tension is to grip the stick just enough to stop it from slipping out of your hand but not enough for there to be any difficulty in pulling it out of your hand. Try this on yourself and your other corps members!
- Pressure should be consistent with all strokes. Increased pressure will diminish the sound quality by cutting off vibrations of the stick.
- Pressure changes can be caused by changes in hand shape. Hand shape must remain consistent as described in your instrument-specific section.
- We want a legato look, meaning we want the stick to mostly be in constant motion. Let the drum rebound and the stick rise to the necessary height.

Stroke Types

There are four stroke types: Rebound, Down, Up, and Buzz / Dead. These stroke types make up everything we play. Understanding the different types is the first step to mastering them. Technique varies little between the strokes, but keep in mind the few differences as you are playing.

- **Rebound**

- Rebound - starts and ends at the same height.
- Has a smooth, pendulum-like motion, without any interference.
- Can be performed at any height.
- Is allowed to rebound fluidly.
- Constant motion throughout the stroke.

- **Down**

- Down - ends lower than its starting position.
- Allow a natural stroke to occur until the implement strikes the playing surface, including subtle pinky engagement.
- Use the wrist and the weight of the hand to stop the stick at a lower height.
- **The grip must remain relaxed!**

- **Up**

- Up - ends higher than its starting position.
- Same quality of sound as the rebound and down strokes.
- Allow natural rebound to occur.
- The fingers are relaxed but remain on the stick.

- **Buzz / Dead**

- Buzz / Dead - pressing the implement into the playing surface to limit vibrations or cause multiple bounces of the implement.
- Utilize the natural weight of the arm to force the implement into the playing surface, allowing for some vibration (legato) or little vibration (staccato).
- Maintain the same tension in the hands, but angle the implement slightly lower down by rotating your wrists about 5%. This will allow more of the arm weight into the stroke, allowing more sound quality in the buzz. You will notice your fulcrum shift from the back of the grip to the front.

Keyboard Guidelines

Approach

When approaching a mallet instrument, make sure the instrument is at the appropriate height before setting your hands. The top of the keys should be at the same height as your waist or belt. Your feet should be shoulder-width apart and at an appropriate distance from the keyboard (one foot should be slightly in front of the other, so you can move back and forth between manuals). This distance is determined by the length of your arm in relation to the type/size of the instrument. When you put your mallets in the center of the bar on the natural keys, your forearm should be slightly below level. If your forearm is completely level, then you need to lower the instrument.

When playing vibraphone, the right foot will be on the pedal and the left will be comfortably behind the pedal. The balance point will be between the heel of the right foot and the ball of the left foot. When playing in the highest register it is suggested that the left foot go behind the right, to make sure the keys are played in the correct playing zone.



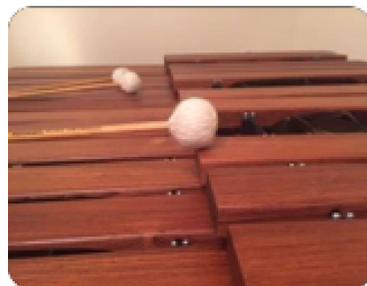
Playing Zones

The correct playing zones for all keyboards are in the center of the bar directly over the resonators. For the accidentals it is best to aim for the top of the resonator tube to ensure that you play directly in the center of the bar. When playing on the edges of the marimba (not applicable to vibes, xylo, or bells), you must make sure that you are playing on the very EDGE of the key, so that you can produce a good full sound. Do Not Play on the NODES!

Yes



Yes



No



Two-Mallet Technique

Grip

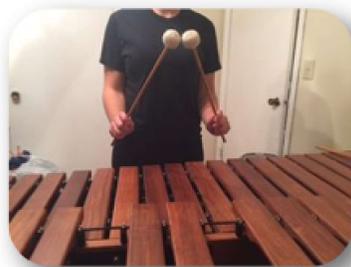
We use the “rear fulcrum” 2-mallet grip. The mallet is held on to by the middle, ring, and pinky fingers with around 1 ½ inches from the back of the hand to the end of the mallet shaft. The thumb and index finger then wrap around the mallet as seen in figure 2, these two fingers should not place any pressure on the mallet. The hand should not be flat but turned in at a slight angle. The wrist and arms should form a natural angle that puts no stress on the wrist joint.



Stroke

From the set position of about a half-inch above the bar, the stroke begins with the head of the mallet and then is continued through the wrist and arm in a fluid motion.

The mallet should come directly up and not away or towards the body or move from side to side. At a moderate tempo the stroke will be mostly wrist and less arm. As the tempo increases the stroke will become all wrist, while as the tempo decreases you will incorporate the arm to connect the strokes. The speed of the mallet coming down to make contact with the board should never change, but the speed of the upstroke will be determined by how slow or fast you are playing. When playing slow connected strokes the mallet should feel like there is a rubber band attached to the keys, so when you move the mallet up it will be as if you are trying to stretch the band and when you initiate the downward motion, the mallet will shoot downward, as if you gave in to the pull of the rubber band.



Four-Mallet Technique

Grip

We use the cross grip and Steven's technique when playing with four mallets. When beginning to learn Steven's technique, we highly recommend purchasing **"Method of Movement" by Leigh Howard Stevens**. This method book has everything you could possibly need to fully understand the grip and different ways you can strike the instrument.

- 1. Turn your hand sideways in a "Handshaking" position. For the inside mallet, put the "butt" of the mallet in the center of the palm, slightly above the "life-line" that goes around the thumb pad.**
- 2. Curve out your pointer finger as if you were creating a perch for a small bird. The mallet will rest on the third joint of the pointer finger, directly above the fingernail.**



3. **The outside mallet will be placed in between the middle finger and the ring finger directly under the first joint (knuckle). The pinky and ring finger will then wrap around the bottom of the shaft.**
4. **The thumb will rest on the top of the mallet creating a fulcrum for the inside mallet. The middle finger will then create stability by resting on the bottom of the shaft. (Your middle finger will either be on top of the shaft or slightly wrapped around it, depending on your hand size.)**



Interval Changes

When changing intervals your goal should be to always keep your thumb on top of the mallet and facing towards the ceiling. You should also make sure to keep your "perch" out and never curl your finger into your palm. Interval changes up to a seventh should always be done by "spinning" or rolling the mallet shaft in between the pointer finger and thumb. As you roll to a larger interval you will see that your pointer finger begins to straighten as your thumb remains on top of the mallet.



When using extended octave grip for long use of octaves or octaves at the bottom of the keyboard, your mallet will roll up your palm towards the base of your fingers. The inside mallet will "lock" in to position at the base of the middle finger and at the top of the palm. This can be found on pg. 12-14 in M.O.M.



Finger Use: The use of fingers is one aspect of drumming that is sometimes overstated. We should never release the stick from our fingers. Instead, the fingers move fluidly with the stick and the wrist and can sometimes be used to add extra volume or speed. The fingers will almost always be used in addition to and never in the place of the wrist motion. They act as a way of keeping the stick in the pocket created by your hand, allowing us to more easily manipulate the motion of the stick as it rebounds off of the drum. Many times, the conscious effort of students using their fingers causes tension and increases the amount of energy we have to expend. This should not be the case. Instead, the fingers only add to our ability to efficiently and effectively manipulate the stick through difficult passages, a way of letting the stick breathe in our hand. This concept will be detailed during the audition events.

Musicality: The purpose of good technique is to produce good sounds. Tone quality is an essential consideration for every musician. In percussion playing tone quality is a factor of several factors, the most important of these factors being velocity of stroke and playing zone. While these are not the only factors, they will help us to begin our discussion of what constitutes a good sound. The bass drummer should strive to move the stick as quickly as possible without tension. Tension kills sound, and that is true of most musicianship. Our primary playing zone will be in the center of the drum. This produces the fundamental pitch and gives our sound a firmer attack. Great care should be taken to play in the exact center. Practice in front of a mirror can help you solidify your muscle memory of this zone but listening to your sound can be very helpful as well. As you move out from the center the attack becomes less pronounced, we excite more overtones from the head, and the sustain of the drum lengthens. Always listen to your sound.

Two of the most important ensemble sound concepts are those of balance and blend. Balance is essentially playing the same volume as the people you are playing with. An unbalanced sound is an immature sound. When your staff is making corrections to your volume, take care to remember the correction as this affects the overall sound of the ensemble. Blend comes from everyone in a section playing with the same tone quality at the same dynamic level. Always listen to your sound.

The concept of phrasing in an ensemble activity is quite different from phrasing in solo playing, although one informs the other. If the student does not have a solid concept of musicality, it will be very difficult to match this phrasing to other players and maintain a balanced sound. As a member of the bassline you should focus on developing a confident and consistent sound at each dynamic level and be able to perform crescendos and decrescendos of varying lengths. Once you are able to do that consistently as an individual, you should have the control to apply the levels of listening. The other challenge for the bass drummer is knowing where your particular volume will fit into the overall shape of a phrase. Playing musically as an individual will inform your choices in the ensemble setting. Always listen to your sound.

As a performer you will be called upon to elicit different emotions through your sound. These different emotions will be conveyed through the style and interpretation of the music. In the drum corps world style is much narrower than in other areas of performance, but it is no less important. If you try to play the ballad with the same approach as the closer it will lack authenticity, and it will fail to connect to your audience. The use of touch in your playing will facilitate the communication of intent to your audience. Keeping in mind that tension kills sound, we may ask you to firm up or lighten up your grip/touch to achieve a desired effect. Solo playing can help you to understand these concepts. Always listen to your sound.

BC Front Fundamentals

Preface

These fundamental exercises should be studied thoroughly. This is a vital building block for our musical success. Each exercise isolates basic skill sets that will be needed for playing both our warm up packet and show music. These exercises will be manipulated and varied by the staff to push our members both mentally and musically. The staff is keen on making musical changes “by rote,” so we heavily emphasize the ability to adapt quickly and learn things “on the fly.” All exercises have a final downbeat on the right hand.

8th Note Timing

Variation: Reverse the order, accent any given partial, play with alternating sticking, or any combination of these.

16th Note Timing

Variation: Reverse the order, accent any given partial, play with alternating sticking, or any combination of these.

Triplet Timing

Variation: Reverse the order, accent any given partial, play with alternating sticking, or any combination of these.

16th Note Grid

Variation: Reverse the order.

Triplet Grid

Variation: Reverse the order.

Metric Mod

Variation: Reverse the order, crescendo each 2-measure phrase, or any combination of these.

Fundamentals

BC Front 2024

Nathan Picard

8th Note Timing

2 3 4 5 6

R R R R | R R R R | R R R R | R RL L R RL L

16th Note Timing

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

RLR RLR RLR RLR | R RLR RLR RLR RL | RL LRL LRL LRL L | LRL LRL LRL LRL

RLR RLR R RLR RL | RL LRL L LRL LRL | RLR R RLRL L LRL | RLR R RLRL L LRL

Triplet Timing

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

RLRLRLRLRLRLRL | RL LR RL LR | R RL LR RL L | LR RL LR RL

RLRLRLRL L R | R RL L LR RL | RLRLRLRL L L | LRLR R R RL

16th Note Grid

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

R l r l R l r l R l r l R l r l | r L r l r L r l r L r l r L r l | r l R l r l R l r l R l r l | r l r L r l r L r l r L r l

R | r | R | r | r L r | r L r | r | R | r | R | r | r L r | r L

R | r | r L r | r | R | r | r L | R | r | r L

Triplet Grid

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

R l r L r l R l r l | r L r l R l r l R l | r l R l r l R l | r l R l r l R l

R l r L r l R l | r l R l r l R l | r L r l R l | r L r l R l

R l r L r l R l | r l R l r l R l | r L r l R l | r L r l R l

Metric Mod

3 3 3 4 3 3 5 6 7 3 3 3 3

R R R R | R R R R R R | R R R R R R R R | R L R L R L R L

3 3 3 3 9

R L R L R L R L | R L R L R L R L | R L R L R L R L | R L R L R L

6 6 6 6

R L R L R L R L | R L R L R L R L | R L R L R L R L | R L R L R L