

A FRESH APPROACH
for the

BEGINNING PERCUSSION CLASS

by MARK WESSELS

An ensemble approach for developing
well-rounded percussionists

BOOK 1

A FRESH APPROACH FOR THE BEGINNING PERCUSSION CLASS

By: Mark Wessels

BOOK 1

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INTRODUCTION: Snare Drum Stand

Every percussionist should be able to set up the snare stand and drum, identify the parts, know how to tune a drum and properly maintain it. Even if you're starting on a practice pad and do not own a drum, you'll eventually be setting up and performing on one during rehearsals and concerts, so learning the basics is extremely important.

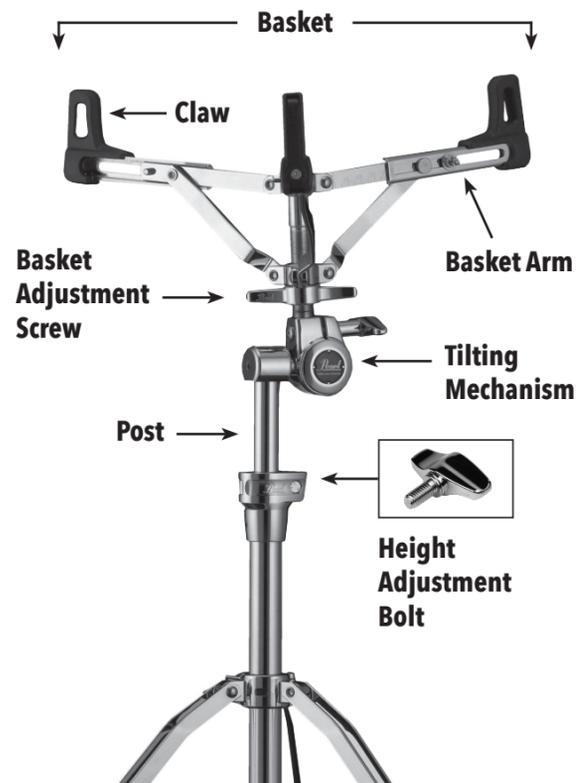
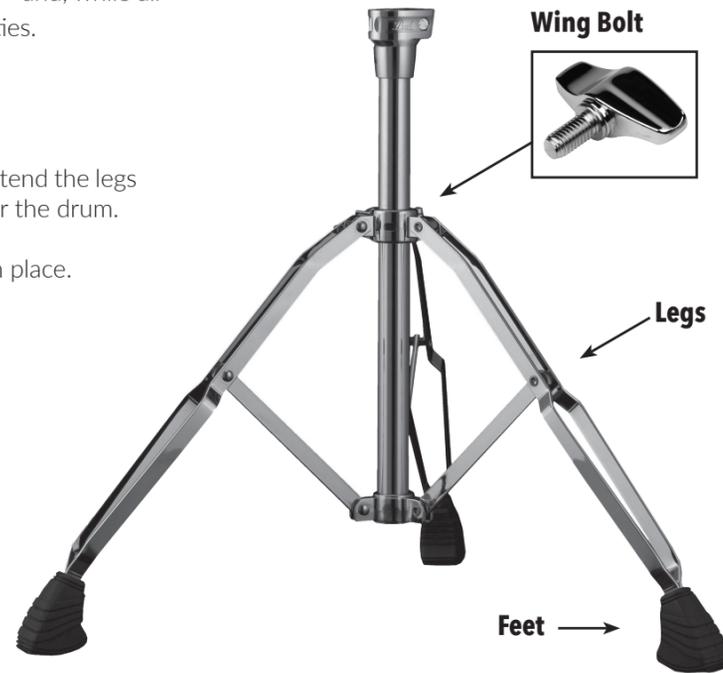
The snare drum stand that is presented here is just one example of hundreds of different models from manufacturers around the world – and, while all stands have unique designs, they share similar functionalities.

Stand Base

Start by setting up the base of the snare stand. Extend the legs far enough apart to provide a solid foundation for the drum.

Slightly tighten the **wing bolt** to secure the legs in place. Avoid over-tightening ANY stand bolts because you'll risk stripping out the threads.

All stands should have rubber feet on the legs to keep it from sliding. Stand legs may be folded up for convenient storage.



Snare Basket Assembly

Insert the top section of your stand into the base. For now, estimate the height of the stand and tighten the height adjustment bolt. We'll fine tune the drum height in a moment.

All stands will have a **basket tilting mechanism** of some sort. Position the basket where it is completely level and tighten the wing bolt.

Open the **basket arms** as wide as possible using the **basket adjustment screw**. When placing the drum inside the basket, be careful to not set the drum on top of a "claw" – it could damage the bottom head (especially if your stand does not have rubber claws).

Tighten the basket width adjustment screw until the claws fit firmly around the drum. The claws will keep your drum from falling off the stand if it gets bumped.

INTRODUCTION: Snare Drum

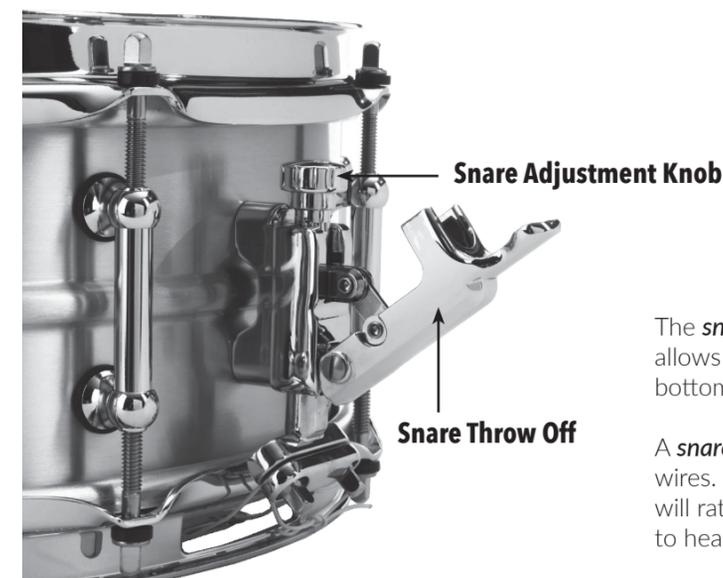
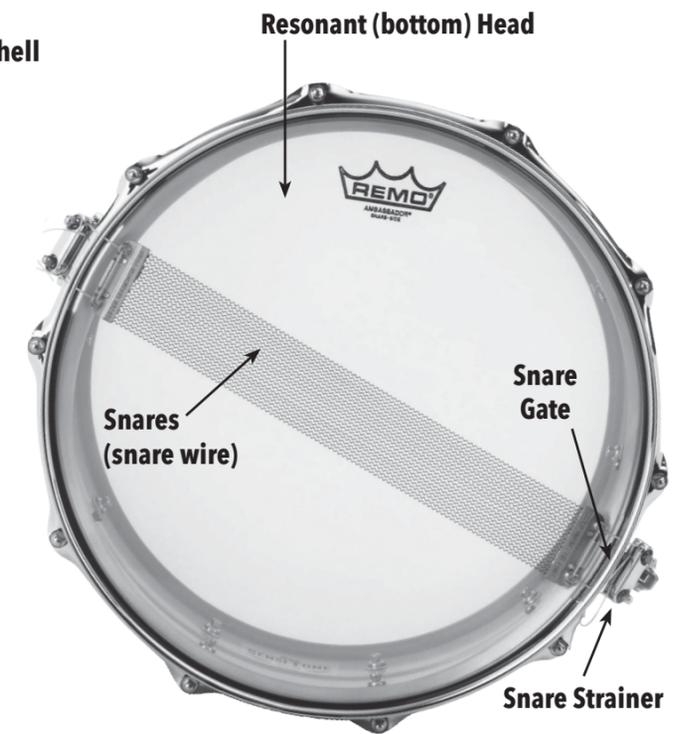


A snare drum **shell** can be made of a wide range of materials, including aluminum, steel or various types of wood. The top head or **batter head** (the one you play on) is much thicker than the bottom head. Most snare drum batter heads are "coated", which controls the natural ring of the drum.

The drum heads are held in place by top and bottom **counter hoops**. **Tension rods** are used to adjust the tension of the drum heads. These rods are threaded into the **rod casing**.

The **resonant head** (bottom head) is made from thin mylar, which allows the snare wire to vibrate when air is pushed through the drum. You must take special care of the bottom head because it is easily damaged.

The **snare**s are usually made from steel wire, but cable and gut are also used for different sound qualities. The snares attach to the **snare strainer** by feeding the string through the **snare gate** (open slot) in the bottom rim.



The **snare throw off** is the lever of a snare strainer mechanism that allows you to turn the snares "on" (engage the snares with the bottom head) or "off" (disengage the snares).

A **snare adjustment knob** is used to adjust the tension of the snare wires. If the wire is too loose when the snares are turned on, they will rattle instead of "buzz". If they are too tight, you won't be able to hear the snare wires buzz when playing soft.

INTRODUCTION: The Keyboard Percussion Instruments

Xylophone

The xylophone is a common instrument in the percussion section. The sounds it produces can range from warm to brilliant, depending on the mallet used. In general, the tone is brighter and projects more than a marimba because of the thickness of the bars.

Xylophone bars are made of rosewood or a synthetic material. Schools will often select synthetic bars because they are much more durable and cost effective.

Like the marimba and vibraphone, the xylophone has *RESONATORS* – the pipes placed below the keys which help amplify the fundamental tone of the bars. The xylophone has a built-in rolling stand or cart which allows for easy transporting. Some stands have height adjustment capabilities which allow for players to set the instrument height based on their size.

Always cover the xylophone when not in use. If you don't have the original cover that came with the instrument, a thick "moving blanket" also works well. This will discourage non-percussionists from playing on the instrument. Like all other percussion instruments, do not set books, music stands, etc. on top of it – even if a cover is used.

When moving the xylophone, it's recommended that it be handled by two percussionists, especially if the stand is weak or flimsy. Small wheels often get snagged on rough surfaces or door jams which can easily damage the frame.



Marimba

The marimba is the most popular keyboard instrument for serious percussionists because of the wide variety of literature that is written for it. Because of the size of the bars and extended range, players are able to incorporate advanced four mallet techniques that allow the instrument to be used in ensembles as well as solo performance at every level.

Marimba bars are made from rosewood, padauk or synthetic materials. Because of the warm tones created, rosewood is the most popular for solo and chamber music applications. Padauk is an inexpensive choice for beginner instruments, but lacks the resonance of rosewood. Synthetic bars are the most popular choice for marching ensembles because of durability and sound consistency in extreme weather.

Always cover the marimba when not in use and avoid setting anything on top of the instrument. Never play on the instrument with a mallet that is harder than the bar. Also, because the lower register bars are generally thin in the center, care must be taken to not play at extremely loud volume levels – even with soft mallets. Because of its size, 2-3 people are necessary to move the instrument, especially when maneuvering through doorways or on rough or uneven surfaces.

Mallet Selection

The characteristic sound of the xylophone is bright and piercing, but it can also produce a wide variety of tonal colors based on the mallet selection. The most common mallet choices are Poly Ball and hard Rubber. For very bright, piercing sounds, Lexan and Plastic/Synthetic mallets are often selected. For warm, blending sounds, soft rubber or hard cord mallets are great choices. Notice how some of these mallets can also be used on the bells.

On any keyboard instrument, care must be given when selecting hard mallets because of the potential damage they may cause to the bars. Never use ANY mallet that is harder than the material of the instrument! Rosewood is generally soft, so only use poly ball or softer mallets. Synthetic bars can generally handle harder mallet materials if played with caution at lower volume levels.



Mallet Selection

The most popular choice on marimba is a yarn-wound mallet with a birch shaft, but rubber or cord-wound mallets with rattan shafts are also frequently used.

Yarn mallets are generally sold in a "series" from very soft to very hard. This allows the player to have a consistent sound from the low range (which requires a soft mallet) to the high range (which requires a hard mallet). Marimbists will often switch between the various mallets as the music calls for soft, warm sounds to bright, piercing tone qualities.

When starting out, the best mallet to purchase is a general "medium" mallet, usually in the middle of a series. This will handle the widest range of the keyboard. As you expand the variety of literature, you may be required to add harder and softer mallets to accommodate additional tonal colors.



DAILY WARM-UP

The daily warm-ups from this lesson include #1-4 on pages 94-97. After you learn the "4 and 4 Doubles" exercise below, add it to your daily practice routine (along with the keyboard "B♭ Major 5 Note Scale").

NEW EXERCISE: "4 and 4 Doubles" (#5)

This exercise alternates between four single strokes and four double strokes. Like the "4 and 4 Buzzes" exercise, the motion of the forearm should be consistent from the 1st measure to the 2nd. The double should be played with two relaxed wrist strokes (not a stroke and a bounce). Try playing it first with your hands on your legs, then with sticks on the drum.

R L R L R R L L R R L L R L R L R R L L R R L L R
L R L R L L R R L L R R L R L R L L R R L L R R L

snare only

NEW STROKE STYLES: Downstroke, Tap & Upstroke

A DOWNSTROKE (or "controlled stroke") is used to CONTROL the natural rebound of the stick after you strike the drum. In the first measure of this exercise, play 2 full height (16") rebound strokes. On the 3rd stroke, apply a slight amount of pressure in your wrist and fingers to stop the stick close to the drum head.

The second measure begins with two soft TAPS, played at a 2-3 inch height. On the 3rd note (the UPSTROKE), play another soft tap, but immediately LIFT the stick to the "up" position. Think of the upstroke as a "check mark" (✓).

16" REBOUND REBOUND DOWN 2-3" TAP TAP UP

MUSIC READING Learn about the DOTTED HALF NOTE on page 41 before playing these lines.

R L R L R L R R L R L R R L R R L R

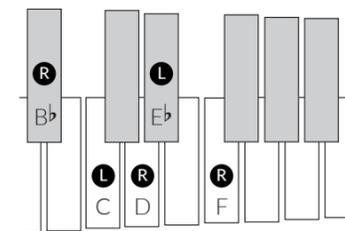
R L R L R L R L R R L R R L R L R

In line #3, play the note heads with an "X" on the rim. Watch the sticking carefully (the "B" is both sticks together)!

R R L R L R R L R R L R L L L R L R L R R L R L

DAILY WARM-UP / The B♭ Major "5 Note Scale" (#5)

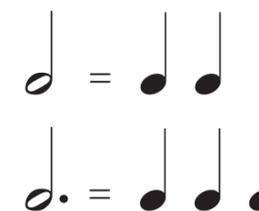
For this lesson, practice exercises #1-4 with the accompaniment track. Add this five note scale to your daily warm-up routine (with the snare "4 and 4 Doubles" exercise #5). Be sure to strike each key in the proper place and avoid the "nodes"!



R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R

DOTTED HALF NOTES

A DOT placed behind a note or rest increases its value by half of the original note's value. Since a HALF NOTE receives TWO beats, a DOTTED HALF NOTE would receive THREE BEATS (since 1/2 of 2 = 1 and 2 + 1 = 3).



EXERCISE: Draw in the bar lines to separate these notes into measures, then write the counts under each note.

MUSIC READING

Do you think these next 3 lines use the same whole & half step pattern that a MAJOR scale uses - or is it another kind of scale?

This line is difficult because it requires you to play a specific sticking. Try to play each stroke in the center of the bar!

R R L R R L R R L R L R R L R L

R L R L R R R L L R R L R R L R

THE CONCERT BASS DRUM

The concert bass drum has the lowest tone in the percussion section. There are 3 basic types of bass drums: the *concert bass drum* (which you see pictured here) for symphonic band or orchestra, the *marching bass drum* which is tuned higher, muffled and used in marching percussion ensembles and the *drum set bass drum* (or "kick drum"), which is played with a foot pedal.

You can learn the fundamental technique for striking and muffling the concert bass drum on page 88. After you learn the basics, take turns with your classmates playing the bass drum part on the following MUSIC READING exercises and PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE below.



MUSIC READING

4 Snare
4 Bass

5

"LIGHTLY ROW"

PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

Many songs will include small *measure numbers* notated at the top of each bar line. This will allow everyone in a rehearsal to quickly find a specific measure. In measure 6, we have new musical symbol called the **one measure repeat sign** (*/.). When you see this sign, repeat the previous measure. The "x" in the snare part should be played on the rim.

SD
BD

6 7 8 9 10

13 14 15 16

4

5

"LIGHTLY ROW"

PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

This song is our first four part percussion "ensemble." Learning to concentrate and perform your individual part with other musicians is an important skill to develop. Each percussionist must be able to play his or her part perfectly in tempo BEFORE you can expect to perform together as an ensemble!

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

TAMBOURINE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

NEW EXERCISE: "Double Bounce" Exercise (#11)

snare/lesson 10B

So far, we've been working on exercises that use relaxed double STROKES and multiple bounces. At this point, we'll learn to play the double bounce, which we'll use to produce "open rolls" in Book 2.

With one hand at a time, play four multiple bounces. Notice the amount of fulcrum pressure that's necessary to produce a great sounding buzz. To produce double bounces, you'll need to RELAX the fulcrum so that the bounce opens up. Experiment with the fulcrum pressure until your double bounces sound like 16th notes. Be sure that you're always playing a stroke and a bounce (with one wrist motion), not double strokes (with two wrist motions)!

"YOU'RE A GRAND OLD FLAG"

GEORGE M. COHAN

Snare Drum

Crash Cym

Bass Drum

B♭ Major Scale and Arpeggio (#11)

mallets/lesson 10B

The next major scale and arpeggio to learn is B♭, which combines the B♭ five note scale and the F five note scale. Practice this scale & arpeggio every day with the snare "Double Bounce" exercise (#11).

DOTTED QUARTER NOTES

Since a QUARTER NOTE receives *two 8th notes*, a DOTTED QUARTER NOTE will receive *THREE*. Each of the measures in this example would be counted and played the same:

new instrument

CRASH CYMBALS

Crash cymbals (or "hand cymbals") are matched pairs of cymbals that are played by a percussionist in an orchestra, concert or marching band. The player holds the cymbals with a strap. Learn the basics for producing a good sounding crash and muting the cymbals on page 91, then apply it to the cymbal part in "You're a Grand Old Flag."



"YOU'RE A GRAND OLD FLAG"

GEORGE M. COHAN

Follow the stickings carefully and watch out for the accidentals in meas. 12, 13 and 16!

GRADUATION PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

CONGRATULATIONS! You've made it to the end of Book One!

This fun ensemble will test your skills on most of the musical concepts, techniques and rhythms that you've learned in this book. You'll also have the opportunity to play several new instruments, including Bongos, Temple Blocks, Sleigh Bells, Ratchet, Whip (Slapstick) and Siren Whistle. Learn about each of these instruments and their playing techniques on pages 92-93.

Like most percussion ensembles, this piece has several special instructions within each part that may be difficult to understand just by looking at the music or reading the explanations. I recommend that you take a few minutes to watch the video lessons and demonstrations of each of the parts before you begin to learn the music.

DIRECTORS: A full conductor's score is available as a free download at mwpublications.com/product/a-fresh-approach-to-beginning-percussion-class/

Keyboards *Jingle Bells* Arr. Mark Wessels

5

7

12

13

17

21

24

25

28

29

30

31

32

in out in out in out in out in out in out

in out in

>

* See special instructions on page 65

APPENDIX RHYTHM READING

snare/lesson 10

①

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

②

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

③

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

④

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

⑤

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

⑥

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

⑦

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

⑧

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

⑨

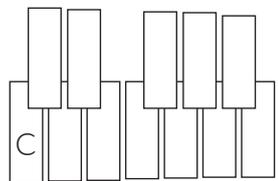
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

⑩

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

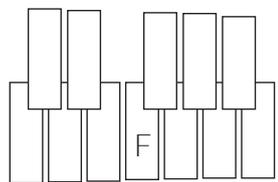
APPENDIX SPEED NOTE READING

These “key finding” exercises help you to quickly locate notes on your keyboard. Your instructor (or fellow classmate) will call out a note name on the first beat, then you will locate and *play* the correct note on your keyboard on the beat following. Start slow, with a metronome set on 60 beats per minute, then gradually speed up the tempo until you reach 120 beats per minute. *You should not have the notes written or engraved on your keys!* If you do, cover them up with a piece of tape.



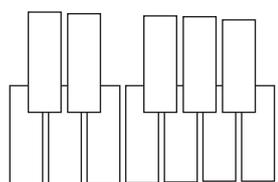
Using the note C as your home base (notes C, D & E):

10 C D C D | E D E C | D E D C | E C D C ||
 11 D C E D | C E C D | E D E C | D E D C ||



Using the note F as your home base (notes F, G, A & B):

12 F G F A | G F A F | G A B A | B G A F ||
 13 G A B F | A F G F | A B F G | B G B F ||



Using the full range (all notes C-B):

14 C D E C | F G F A | C E D E | F A B F ||
 15 F A B G | E C D E | A G B F | C G F C ||

These exercises reinforce note reading for Lessons 3-6. Try using a stop watch to see how fast you can SAY each line accurately!



ACCESSORY PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

SUSPENDED CYMBAL ROLLS (GRADUATION ENSEMBLE)

Rolling on a suspended cymbal requires a soft yarn mallet, either one designed for the suspended cymbal (with a heavy rubber or wood core) or a soft, weighted marimba mallet. Timpani mallets are also an option, but you'll want to select one with a large felt head so that you can't hear the harsh attack of the wooden core at the center of the mallet.

Cymbal rolls are played with mallets at the edge in the 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock position at the edge of the cymbal. Use single alternating strokes, starting slow and soft, then gradually increasing the velocity and speed of the strokes to crescendo.

A common problem percussionists typically have with long cymbal rolls is that they typically play a crescendo too loud too early. Listen to the ensemble to maintain balance and do not overplay the peak of the crescendo.



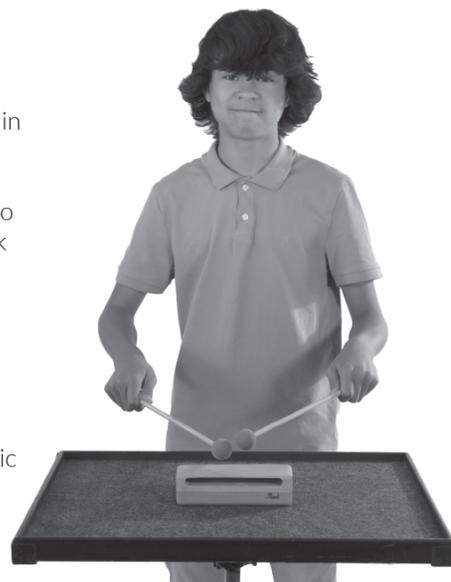
WOOD BLOCK (LESSON 8B)

To get the best sound possible, wood blocks should be played with a variety of medium "poly" (polyethylene) or hard rubber mallets. Never use a stick or mallet that is harder than the wood the block is made from.

A synthetic "jam block" is a good option if you need a bright, penetrating sound which can be played at a much louder volume than a wooden block. Sticks and hard mallets are great options on a synthetic block.

Wood blocks have a horizontal slit on one side, which provides resonance. For single notes and simple rhythms, hold the wood block in your non-dominant hand and strike it with the mallet in the opposite hand.

Always play the woodblock in the "sweet spot" to make the best sound – in the center of the block over the outer edge of the slit.



Percussionists are often required to move between multiple instruments quickly. If you do not have time to pick up the wood block, or if you need to play fast rhythmic passages with two mallets, you may place the wood block on a tray table or sturdy music stand with a cloth or foam covering.

CRASH CYMBALS (LESSON 10B)

Crash cymbals are held by leather straps in much the same grip as the right hand snare grip. Let the strap drape over the second joint of the index finger, then close the grip with the thumb on top of the strap, as close as possible to the bell. The end of the thumb may rest on the bell to help support the cymbal.

Percussionists often do not use cymbal pads because they muffle the cymbal. Because cymbals may be heavy, you should use a cymbal cradle or table to rest during long rehearsals or performances. Never leave cymbals laying on the floor when not in use!



To play the crash cymbals, you'll position the cymbal in the non-dominant hand on bottom and dominant hand cymbal on top. The bottom cymbal is held stationary with the top cymbal slightly offset by 1-2 inches to eliminate any "air pockets" that may result if the edges were aligned.

For repeated crashes, move only the top cymbal towards the bottom, striking the edges at the same time. For most dynamic ranges, there should only be a few inches between the cymbals.



For a full, sustained cymbal crash, the top cymbal is held higher, at a slight angle. As you bring the cymbals together, the bottom edge will hit slightly before the top edge, creating a "flam" sound, which helps you to avoid air pockets and produces a full, bold crash. After the cymbals are struck together, bring your hands apart and down slightly in order for the cymbals to vibrate freely.

To DAMPEN the cymbals, bring the edges against the upper body. For normal dampening, allow the cymbals to ring for the duration of the note value, then slowly bring the cymbals into the upper body. For quick "staccato" notes, dampen the cymbals immediately after the crash with a quick motion.

Use this exercise to practice playing cymbal crashes of varying note lengths. Start at a normal volume level, but also practice playing the entire exercise at piano, forte, with a gradual crescendo (piano to forte) and a gradual diminuendo (forte to piano).



LESSON PROGRESS CHART **DAILY WARM-UP**

SNARE DRUM

MALLETS

LESSON 8

Pass
Off

Teacher's
Initials

Ex 1: "8-4-2-1" *m.m.= 80-128 (8th notes)*

Ex 1: "8-4-2-1" *m.m.= 80-128 (8th notes)*

Ex. 7: Single Paradiddle (with Accents) *m.m.= 90*

Ex 7: A \flat 5 Note Scale *m.m.= 90*

Ex. 8: "Flam Basics" *m.m.= 90*

Ex 8: "Changing 5 Note Scales" *m.m.= 90*

Ex. 9: "13-5-9 Rolls" *m.m.= 90*

Ex 9: "C Major Scale and Arpeggio" *m.m.= 90*

LESSON 9

Pass
Off

Teacher's
Initials

Ex 1: "8-4-2-1" *m.m.= 80-132 (8th notes)*

Ex 1: "8-4-2-1" *m.m.= 80-132 (8th notes)*

Ex. 8: "Flam Basics" *m.m.= 100*

Ex 8: "Changing 5 Note Scales" *m.m.= 100*

Ex. 9: "13-5-9 Rolls" *m.m.= 100*

Ex 9: "C Major Scale and Arpeggio" *m.m.= 100*

Ex. 10A: Flam Paradiddle, Step One *m.m.= 90*

Ex 10: "F Major Scale and Arpeggio" *m.m.= 90*

LESSON 10

Pass
Off

Teacher's
Initials

Ex 1: "8-4-2-1" *m.m.= 80-136 (8th notes)*

Ex 1: "8-4-2-1" *m.m.= 80-136 (8th notes)*

Ex. 9: "13-5-9 Rolls" *m.m.= 110*

Ex 9: "C Major Scale and Arpeggio" *m.m.= 110*

Ex. 10B: Flam Paradiddle, Step Two *m.m.= 100*

Ex 10: "F Major Scale and Arpeggio" *m.m.= 100*

Ex. 11: "Double Bounces" *m.m.= 90*

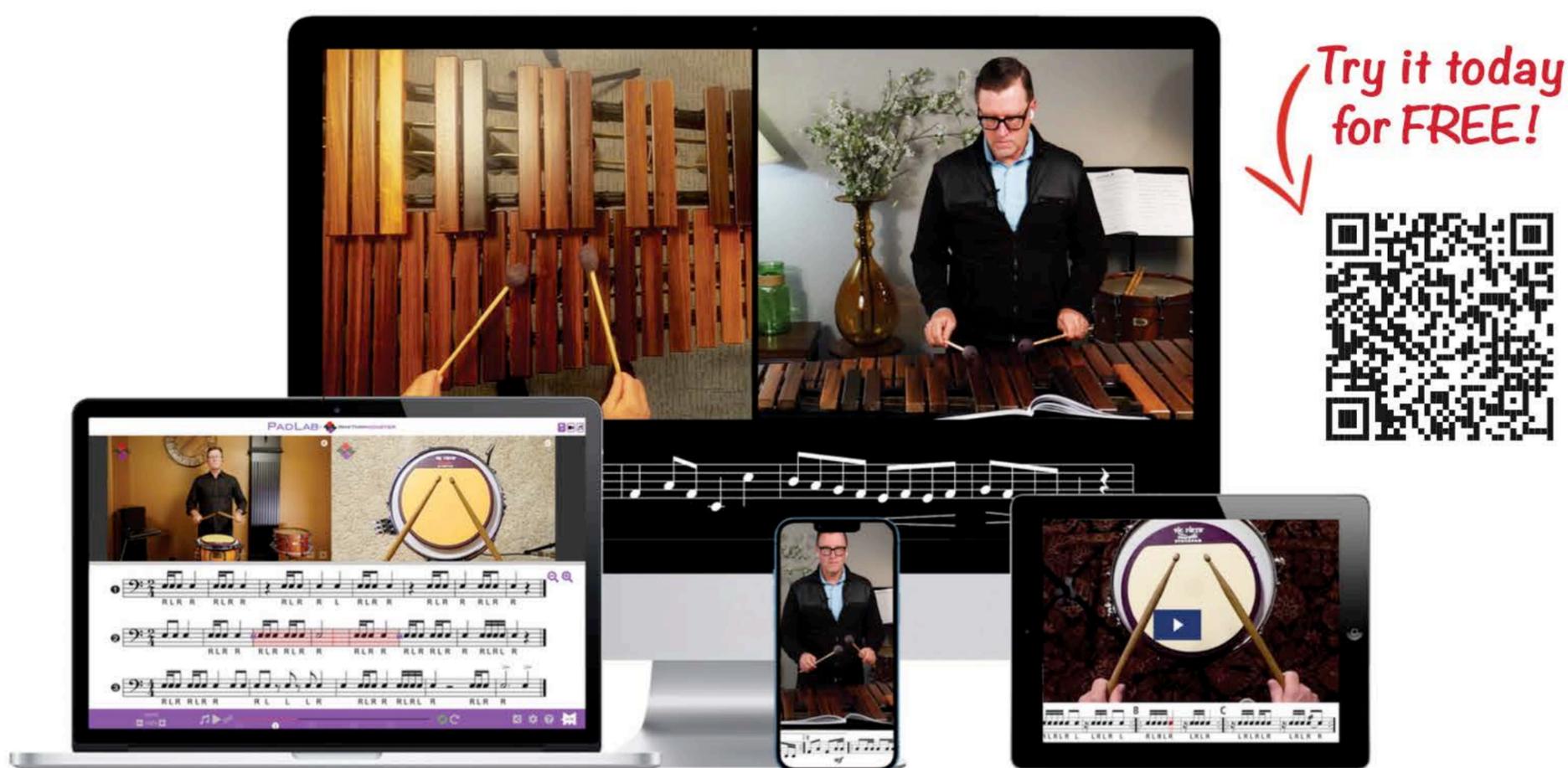
Ex 11: B \flat Major Scale and Arpeggio *m.m.= 90*

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